

The Big Apple, One Bite at a Time

APPLAUSE FOR BACALI



*To Antonio,
Thanks for the
Great Sun Streaks
Big Kisses
Marion Pundell*

Letting aside the delicate question of the lady's age, which is only 45, for God's sake, and also doing one's level best to ignore the fact that Long & Skinny has become something more like Long & Stringy, it is perfectly natural and right that Lauren Bacall should be making her debut this week as the star of a Broadway musical. Katharine Hepburn did it just a few months

Anthony Morrocco

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The Big Apple, One Bite at a Time

Chapter 1: New York in the '60s

The Big Apple has always had a unique kind of energy. You can feel it the moment you arrive, no matter who you are, or where you've come from. Fred Astaire got that part right.

1964 inaugurated a rocky start for all of us. Our President had been assassinated, our new Camelot was already in ruins... but life went on and so did we. When I arrived in New York, there was a certain feeling in the air, and you could sense it from the soles of your feet up to the almost tingling tips of your hair. Perhaps it was a different kind of energy from the one I sensed on that childhood hilltop at age four, and the one in Grandma Lena's garden, but it was energy nonetheless. It was everywhere, in all the people, on every street, and in every brick.



The famous World's Fair was opening its doors for the first time in history, and already the streets were crowded with visitors, hoping to see a vision and a show of the bright future they imagined. It was a new world of skyscrapers, smog, cabs and hotdog stands, Madison Avenue and Times Square, and masses of people moving in throngs down every street. It was going to be the next big life adventure, Antonio style – and I would be damned if it wasn't going to be done *my way*.

On February 7th of the same year, a Pan Am Yankee Clipper flight 101 from London Heathrow landed at New York's Kennedy Airport, and four young British men stepped onto the tarmac. "Beatlemania" had officially arrived in town with their falsetto whoops, jangly guitars and floppy pudding bowl haircuts creeping around every corner, leaking out of every passing radio. Sinatra was long gone, Elvis was looking like a dinosaur lumbering up over the horizon of the past. This was the strange world I was stepping into, but nothing could have prepared me for what was to come.

Thanks once again to the US Navy, Uncle Sam generously paid the dime for my education, no matter what school I chose. I had no idea where to start, so I enrolled in the Brooklyn Campus of the Pratt Institute, and signed up for a few basic classes that interested me: architecture, illustration, graphic design, painting and drawing. What was I thinking?

As soon as I started, I realized that I had made a terrible mistake. It felt like senior year in high school all over again. After my white-knuckle adventures in Morocco and my life-affirming travels in Europe, this business of study was claustrophobic, soul-destroying. I felt like a true artist, a dynamo of creativity, and hell, I didn't need stuffy old lecturers telling me what I could or could not do.

In my view, I had already graduated – albeit from the Navy – and life itself, and the whole universe was going to be my university. There was just no way that these lecturers were going to box me into a life that wasn't worth living. I spent sleepless nights mulling over my destiny. I knew that the choice I settled on would determine my life's path, but it wasn't clear to me yet – it was still unfolding.

Thanks to my grandmother's influence I trusted the process of life, but still – there were practical considerations to take into account. A few hundred dollars a month from the Navy paid for my classes and books. I was covering my rent and subway rides, but even so, I was working three jobs, plus attending the occasional class.



The pressure increased until the critical point arrived—and then, right on cue, the phone rang.

When you learn to flow with the process of your own life, these kinds of things happen all the time. Call it the Law of Attraction, synchronicity, or just the Mystery and Magic of Time – but it's real. When the time is right, the waves of the sea part, and the pathway opens up.

I picked up the phone. On the other end of the line was Larry Decrasanti, who was then my boss at Luxury Catering NYC, where I worked as a part-time bartender, waiter, cook and bottle washer.

"Antonio!" He said over the crackling line, "A good friend of mine just broke up with his girlfriend and they have a rent-controlled apartment at 77th Street on 2nd Avenue, and they just deserted the place..."

I could not believe what I was hearing. Here was the answer I had been looking for! Larry kept talking fast:

"...So go to the West Side Real Estate office and claim this address: 1442 2nd Avenue, Apartment 21, and tell them it is Dominick Scarpenatti's apartment."

I dropped the phone and began a mad scramble across New York. I had to repeat the address name over and over in my head to make sure I didn't forget it! I must have looked like a madman standing in the subway car or running down the street repeating it. I nearly tripped over a woman and almost bumped into a cop, but I made it, panting and happy!

After arriving at the West Side Real Estate office, the woman who worked behind the desk took one long look at me, and then disappeared behind closed doors for a few moments; that seemed to me an eternity. Then she reappeared with papers in her hand.

"It's \$68.00 a month, rent-controlled. That means the rent stays at \$68.00 for as long as you live there, provided you don't sub-lease or abandon the apartment..." She continued talking, but I couldn't hear everything she was saying since I was so lost in my thoughts ... *It's impossible, but it's happening! Pure gold!* I thought to myself.

A rent-controlled apartment in the Upper East Side of Manhattan was rare. But for \$68 a month, including 4 rooms, and with a view of the East River – it was a gift from the universe. My days of sharing a Navy barracks dorm were over. Hello Freedom!

Chapter 2: Life's University Continues: Kenneth's Salon



Funny enough, Larry's role in my life wasn't over. He was also the one who by some miracle or another got me the job as an apprentice at Kenneth's Salon, which was also going to be the first stepping stone to the next leg of my journey. I had already enrolled in hairdressing school, but I still had no idea that this was going to be the direction my life's path would take. But, as I was to learn, some kind of unstoppable force was at work.

The fact that my ancestral roots stretched back to Venice counted in my favor that day. Rosemary Sorrentino, the woman who interviewed me, and for whom I would be working as an apprentice, was from Sicily. We bonded instantly, in the true Italian way, and she hired me on the spot.

Little did I know what that would mean for my career. This wasn't just a regular hair salon for the rich—it was *the place to go* for the super-rich and famous. The Salon belonged to Kenneth Battelle, whom most people called "Mr. Kenneth." He has been described as the world's first celebrity hairdresser. For people like me, he was the Michelangelo of hair.

The Apprentice to Life

I was hired at Kenneth's to be Rosemary Sorrentino's private assistant, and I was ecstatic! I realized that I was entering the Apprenticeship of a Lifetime, a dream coming true.

All through high school, I'd been very dissatisfied with boring teachers, boring classes, and flat subjects—never finding nor discovering anything stimulating in any area of my so-called studies.

Freshman year at Saint Anthony's in Bristol, Connecticut was worse. The Catholic nuns and priests there were mostly very angry and at war with themselves over emotional and especially physical handicaps. And it showed, as being with them was more like being in the military. With total control by the nuns and the priests, it was "Do as I say or else!"

In those days a nun could beat the crap out of you and even bloody your knuckles or nose—and children had no rights or defense. Then when we went home and told our Mom or Dad that the nun or priest had beat us up that day, our parents would simply say “You must’ve done something very bad!” and we would get another beating just for telling them about how cruel the nuns were.

After enough of that, I told my Father, “Daddy-O”, that I wanted to be taken out of Catholic School and placed into the public school system in my freshman year. But he flat-out refused, saying, “I never could go to college due to World War II, so now you will do that for me.” Daddy-O was very bitter for having to drop out of high school and go into the Army and support his family. This left him frustrated—and here he was now taking it out on me.

I got expelled from my freshman year by lighting up a cigarette in my Latin class, much to Sister Assunta’s horror, thus leading to my expulsion on the spot. With this Daddy-O announced, “I now wash my hands of your education and you can do as you please. I am through with you and your education—and especially with you!” So with this “Blessing,” I entered Bristol Central High School and soon realized I faced the same disappointments with teachers, who were only there to do a job to get a pay check at the end of the month, and with the classes that were miserably boring with no excitement or creativity in sight.

Thus in my senior year, I realized I could “Join the Navy and See the World.” So I flat-out quit high school in my senior year: I just walked out and into the US NAVY. It was 1961 and the world was my Oyster. And I was ready—“Hey World Here I AM...!”

Now it was 1964 and I was out of the U S NAVY and was entering into a real apprenticeship as they did in the good old days, but only this was starting at the top of the class. Mr. Kenneth’s Salon was the most sought-after salon in the whole wide world and many hairdressers who were already stars coveted a position there.

I realized then and there that this was a chance of a lifetime and that I would work and apprentice at Mr. Kenneth’s for four years learning from two Masters: Kenneth would teach me hair shaping and haircutting techniques, and Rosemary would teach me hair coloring. *Et voila!* There I was in a position of learning from Michelangelo and Leonardo di Vinci all rolled into one, and no need to go to another boring school full of unhappy professors.

My plan for learning was simple: I would watch Kenneth and Rosemary all day do their artistic crafts, and then three nights a week I would take a subway up to Harlem where my Italian friends lived 93rd Street and 2nd Avenue. Gino had befriended me and was teaching me how to become a picker. In those days there were hundreds of secondhand stores in New York City alone and Gino was teaching me how to recognize the real stuff from the ordinary stuff.

He would take me into a thrift store show me a real miniature bronze where it was signed, the markings and signs that this was a real, one-of-a-kind original and all the details that would show it was the real deal. Also Gino would point out other copies and cheaper made bronzes that were made to look like the real McCoy but were indeed cheap copies. The laundry list was endless with porcelain; Bavarian, European, Chinese, and Japanese fine bone china; or truly masterful, crafted table settings; or amazing lead crystal or truly exquisite crystal glasses etched with 24 karat gold trimming—and it was an endless learning process. All this and more was what I had been searching for throughout my young growing up days, throughout high school, and beyond. Now here I was, a mere 22-year-old man, entering another Culture, one of Master Craftsmen, Master Artisans and even Spiritual Masters.

So now I would leave Kenneth's around 6:30 or 7:30 pm, depending on how late Rosemary would work, and take a subway to Italian Harlem and go straight to Gino's neighborhood to practice my just learned crafts on his Italian family and friends. I figured out early on that what I had been watching all day had to be translated into my very own hands, and it was now time to practice, practice, practice what I had been watching from these two Maestros all day long.

Upon arriving at one of their apartments, Rosie or Maria or any of these real street Italian families, I would be greeted with a glass of homemade vino and a plate of some exotic pasta to get me started. Then it would be time to take out my scissors and do a basic hair shaping or layout my hair coloring stuff and start practicing the latest in streaking one's hair.

Streaking was invented by Rosemary—the art of Tortoise Shell Streaking as she called it back in the early 1950's—and she had perfected this style of Blonde Streaking into an art form that only Rosemary had brought to the heights of high demand from the SUPER RICH. Rosemary was the only true artist to achieve this look at the time. But now here I was following her lead and learning the art of weaving with tin foils, of how to turn a women's hair from any shade of brown into looking like she had spent six months in the tropics and was left with the most Glorious Natural Sun Streaking effect that only the Goddess herself, Mother Nature, could perform.

This was truly an art form, and one that I took on very seriously. So I would go to Harlem faithfully three nights per week for years and practice, practice, practice the art of hair shaping and hair coloring and the ultimate art of Apprenticing with the MASTERS.

The usual nights would be fun and full of real Italian lifestyle adventures. The Italian ladies I would be working on would be very loud and aggressive Italian housewives of mostly truck driver types. The husbands were usually out of town driving trucks across the country and Rosie or Maria would be home with the kids and immediate family surrounding her—very boring and small world lives. Generally after being fed, I would start with one of these Italian beauties and the rest of them would be usually sitting around playing cards. This was no normal family card game, by no means.

These women meant real business as there was money at stake: dimes and quarters would be flying back and forth across the table to be had by the shrewdest, most aggressive mama or the loudest-mouthed madame. Usually these ladies would all be smoking cigars confiscated from their now hardworking husbands and drinking homemade wine or beer made by their grandfathers or uncles for such occasions.

The atmosphere was quite educational in and of itself and showed me a side of an Italian lifestyle that I was not used to as my families back in Connecticut were mere country bumpkins compared to NYC street people who were survivors of living in the Big Apple.

Sometimes Rosie would stick her head out the window in between puffs of her cigar and yell across to the other building to another Maria or Rosie saying, “Hey Maria! I’m getting my hair colored by Antonio who works at the famous Kenneth’s’ Salon and he’s doin Hair Streaking, making my hair look blonde—see the tin foils on my head?” And then Rosie would belch out in great excitement, “ Yeah and these dames downtown pay like \$500 dollars to get their hair done by Antonio at the salon can you imagine that? And all I had to do was feed Antonio some of Mama’s lasagna and Uncle Joe’s vino, and I’m gonna look like one of those high-falooting dames from Society. How do you like those apples? ,etc. etc.” Then she would scream a few Italian obscenities and puff a few more puffs on her cigar, and then come back inside for me to complete my apprenticeship in training.

Other times I would have kids and old ladies and men lined up to practice hair shaping on and each one would sit down in my chair in the most reverend state of awe saying, “Okay, Antonio. You know I don’t have a lot of dough, but Gino said to just give you a bottle of vino or some homemade beer and you would be okay with that for payment.” Knowing these folks struggled for every dollar I did not even take tips from them but would insist that a bottle of vino or beer was a real treat for me, and they would all be happy thinking that they had made a payment, and everyone would be the better for a fair trade. Some would even give me a platter of pasta and eggplant to take with me, so I had plenty of homemade Italian food to keep a growing young man in his early 20’s fed and happy for the rest of the week.

After all, it was 1965 and I had the rest of my life ahead of me. After all, I was starting to realize my dreams were coming true: One day I would have a real craft that I would use for the rest of my life. I could travel and make money on the spot any time anywhere! After all, I was now endorsed by Kenneth and Rosemary as the next generation of real NYC culture, a true Artist and growing entrepreneur.

Kenneth became wildly famous for creating Jacqueline Kennedy's bouffant in 1961. Among his customers were the famous Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, and many of America's most high profile socialites such as Brooke Astor and Happy Rockefeller, all the Kennedy ladies, and the Fords. Mr. Kenneth was also the first and only hairdresser to win a Coty Award.

If Mr. Kenneth was Michelangelo, then Rosemary Sorentino was the Leonardo da Vinci of hair coloring. What a place to work at! All these famous personalities had to pass through my hands on their way to the maestros—and I was learning fast from the University of Life. It felt like I had been given an all-access backstage pass to the lives of some of the most famous people in the world. Even if I was just a lowly apprentice and an outsider to many places I visited while working at Kenneth's, I had somehow been admitted into the inner circle of fame.

I remember that one famous client, Faye Dunaway, was shooting *The Thomas Crown Affair* with Steve McQueen. Rosemary and I were in the contract, and we got to fly back and forth between LA and NYC. We also got to attend a cocktail party in Fay's fabulous West Side apartment. When we got there, we couldn't help but notice the entrance bedecked with silver foil, which Faye had set a trend for. I will never forget what I felt when I walked through the door and saw that inside she had an incredible Spanish kitchen, with a balcony so we could step outside—something which was quite rare for NYC.

Another regular customer at Kenneth's was Jackie Kennedy. Rosemary colored her hair every six to eight weeks. During this time she was regularly featured in all the newspapers. Her affair with Aristotle Onassis the wealthy Greek shipping magnate—or "Ari" like she affectionately called him—was hot news. She used to affectionately call him "Ari," and told us that "they still want to kill us." She was with him because he offered her and her kids protection from whoever killed Kennedy and from the press and public. I remember I had lunch with Kenneth and Rosemary several times at Jackie's Central Park condo. I will never forget that going through all those security checkpoints was one of the most glamorous and exciting times in my life.

Glamorous Parties and Mansions

The mid-to-late-sixties in New York were spectacular. This was the era where disco was born, and when the first playboy club opened its doors. The famous Studio 54 was pumping and drawing crowds from far and wide. Names like Greenwich Village, the Upper East and West Sides were becoming world-famous. It was a rich tapestry of culture, and a celebration of life and energy.

It was a rich tapestry of culture and a celebration of life and energy.

Greenwich Village of the 60s was something to behold. It was a hub of revival in art, music, politics, literature, poetry, Eastern Mysticism, New Age thinking and a new kind of mindset. Names like Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg and Andy Warhol were legends. The hippies were discovering meditation and yoga. There were protests against the Vietnam War, and there were the Stonewall Riots. Amidst all the racial tension and violence of the time, there were those that only wanted peace, and to be left alone by 'the man.' I saw the strangest kinds of human beings you can imagine.



You could walk from one block to another and experience the smells and colors, the tastes of ten countries. You would hear twenty different languages along the way, and see an amazing display of humanity at its best – or worst. This was life on the island called Manhattan, and the city that never slept. I was in the middle of it, drinking it all in, and I didn't get much sleep either. I knew I was part of a throbbing culture that was re-shaping history, and it felt wonderful.

My neighbors had no idea what kind of people I was getting to know at the Salon, and they didn't know where those chauffeurs in the expensive cars were taking me. The wealthy clients at Kenneth's had no problem sending a car for their favorite hairdresser – and I wasn't complaining. It beat walking.

There were often invitations to go out to the East Hamptons for the weekends.

Sometimes a car would pick me up, and take me out to the East Side on 23rd Street where the seaplanes docked. Then I would board one of those planes, and fly out to the fabulous beach homes of Kenneth's wealthy clients and friends. It was like a dream...

And what homes! It was a cultural phenomenon that rivalled Monaco and Paris, right there in NYC.

Parties of the Woolworths Brats

The 'roaring twenties' might have had the likes of the Great Gatsby, but in the sixties people like Barbara Hutton and Jimmie Donahue, of the Woolworths fortune, threw parties that would have put those to shame.

Frank W. Woolworth, the grandfather, had built a billion dollar empire, working every day for 66 years. His company was a household name, and employed thousands of hard-working people.



Barbara Hutton

Barbara and Jimmie, the grandchildren, blew it all in the space of a decade or two. It was a tale of 'from rags to riches – and then back to rags again.'

Those two kids led outrageously debauched lifestyles, and didn't care a dam for ordinary people.

Barbara Hutton married seven husbands – including more than one Prince, a famous actor (Cary Grant) and a tennis player, and went through mansions just as quickly as marriages. She once famously said: 'Living well is the best revenge' - and meanwhile the workers at Woolworths got pay cuts. It was bad for business, but she just didn't care.

She was one of the richest women in the world, and also one of the unhappiest, and eventually she took to alcohol and drug abuse on a grand scale. She had inherited billions at the age of seven, and never once in her life knew the value of money. In the end, she

died penniless and alone.

I could only watch from a distance, shaking my head. Those parties were the stuff of fables.

Donahue wasn't without blame either. He was a fast-talking playboy, who ruined the reputation of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Everyone knew Jimmie was gay – he had a string of affairs – so the Duke never suspected the truth about him and the Duchess. But the truth came out, eventually. Just like Barbara Hutton he turned to liquor and drugs, and after a downward spiral, he was found dead in his bedroom of a drug overdose. So much for all the money in the world.

What was I doing in the homes of people like this? My life was so completely different to theirs. Not just that, my values were completely different too. I had little interest in their debauchery – they just wanted me around because of the Salon. As interesting as all the glamour and wealth was, it certainly wasn't fulfilling in any way. I was an outsider – just a little fly on the wall.

Mansions of the Super Rich

I remember once going to Woody Allen's enormous 123 bedroom beach mansion. Each of those rooms had its own fireplace. He threw some of the most high-profile parties, which were always attended by Everybody who was Anybody, and those parties were always in the news. One of his latest movies, *Café Society* catches something of the flavor of those times. Woody typed the scripts to all his movies on a typewriter from the 1950's. He would always get people at his parties to change the ribbon, because he never bothered to learn how to do it himself.

Sometimes in the summer Kenneth would take us out to Fire Island, where he had his own beach resort, which was a gift from one of his wealthy admirers. Often we arrived at the docks in a seaplane, and got to enjoy a taste of the kind of life most people can only dream of.



Mia Farrow

Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Jimmy Durante, Woody Allen, Lee Strasberg and Marilyn Monroe all made their way to Fire Island. It was an eclectic and exclusive society--yet there I was, a simple man among the complicated, watching and learning.

After a while it started to become an everyday thing to be in a disco with someone like Judy Garland, or be driven to a party thrown by Nancy Sinatra or Mia Farrow, who was married to Woody Allen. Like Allen's other wives, she also starred in more than one of his movies. Another mansion, another party, another day.

If it wasn't Fire Island or the Hamptons, it was New Canaan, Connecticut, or a luxury penthouse overlooking Central Park. I would find myself waking up in the guest bedroom of some incredible mansion, with a fireplace roaring, snow falling softly outside, and breakfast in bed delivered by the servants.

I have some fond memories of times like those—the feeling of being cocooned in luxury while the snow falls gently from the sky outside. There I lay, thinking about how strange the twists and turns of life can be. The owners would refer to these palaces as their "little retreat in the country." Most of us would call it our dream. What a privilege it was to get to experience all that—the good and the bad all rolled together.

Even though I was nothing but a humble hairdresser, it was all about who you knew, and being in the right place at the right time. On the one hand, it was fake and pretentious, but on the other hand, this was the lifestyle you only got to see in the movies—yet there I was, by some miracle, in the middle of it.

I never deluded myself into thinking it was my home, or my privilege, because I was always the outsider, the hired help, and the court jester—if not the king's fool.

Call it what you will, it was an experience like none other. Over those five years, however, it began to dawn on me that something was missing from this "lifestyle of the rich and famous." I could sense it in the famous people I was meeting, and I could feel it growing inside me too.

As attractive and interesting as it all was, this wasn't going to be the way I spent my entire life. I wanted something else—something I couldn't quite give a name to yet—but it was calling me.

It was more than just disillusionment. Something from my childhood, from those fond memories of my grandmother's garden, and something even deeper was at work inside my soul. It was becoming hard to ignore.

As they say, when the student is ready, the master will appear. A strange déjà vu experience would lead me towards a spiritual awakening – but that's the subject for another chapter.

Meantime, it was a time like no other. The culture of Greenwich Village, the bohemians, the stars, and the energy of New York... The adventure of a lifetime! There I was, burning the candle at both ends, hardly getting any sleep, and studying the lessons of the University of Life. It was also during this time that I met two amazing people who became my 'adopted' parents, Bernie and Evelyn—and that's the next story I want to share in.

Chapter 3: Fire Island: The Bohemians and the Meatballs



Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Fire Island was a place unlike any other place in the world. There was a special kind of magic and mystery there. It was created by the mixture of white beach sand, bottles of champagne, cocktails, art, people, and wild imagination. These were some of my craziest, most cherished, and most memorable adventures of my life.

The Times were—a—Changin’, Beatnik: Another Renaissance

The conservative ideas of the 1950s were being thrown to the wind all over America, and the blossoming youth culture was like a revolution--nowhere more so than in Cherry Grove and The Pines on Fire Island.

During the 1950s, the mindset of most Americans—the way they thought about all kinds of things—was still influenced by the post-war recession years. Most people still believed in good, honest hard work with straight and conservative values, and they believed in nothing more strongly than the prosperity of America. In other words, most of them were stuffy and boring.

But the 1960s saw the young girls trading their wide, pleated skirts and pencil skirts for miniskirts. Tight sweaters and cardigans were thrown out, or burned, and young people now wore the psychedelic colors of the “Summer of Love”. There I was, in the strangest place in the country—maybe the whole world—during the grandest Cultural Revolution in modern times.

America was changing, and the changes were spreading in colorful waves across the entire world. I remember that Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were on the news all the time—until they were both killed—and so were all the riots that came with the race clashes. The times were a-changing, and the young people had new ideas about freedom, music, psychedelic

drugs, relationships, gender and about what was best in life. The old rules were nonsense to us. It was time for an all-night party, for beat poetry, and acoustic guitars under the moonlight on the beach. That suited me much better than an old-fashioned, dreary life of conformity to someone else's ideas. The old-school fought against the changes, but there was no stopping the tide—especially on Fire Island.

Ever since the 1920s, the little island has been an eclectic sort of place—a small getaway from Long Island, only 36 miles long and less than half a mile wide. It attracted a lot of artists from the Broadway scene over the years. Up until 1962 there was no electricity, and no cars allowed on the island except for emergency vehicles. It was primitive living—but some people seemed to find that kind of lifestyle attractive. It didn't matter to them that it was a hassle to light the house at night, or that you risked burning the place down with gas lamps on rickety old fittings. Luckily, not too long after I was there things started to change. There was a secret community of bohemians and artists that slowly grew into something much bigger as the parties became wilder, the music got louder, and the way people dressed became more outrageous. Fire Island became a kind of Mecca for those souls who didn't fit into mainstream America. For me it was a haven, and a playground, full of all the best things, and some of the best people I've ever met. And some of the worst.

All-Night Parties and Crazy Times

Cherry Grove was the wildest spot on the island. Every summer, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, the rich and famous bohemians rubbed shoulders with dancers, the wildlings and the party-goers from dawn till dusk. Nudity wasn't a problem in the Grove. It didn't matter if you were into boys or girls either—except, of course, for the police force on the island—not to mention the Italian mafia who wanted all the cash that flowed into the restaurants, hotels and dance halls! But there was no stopping it. Today, of course, nobody bats an eyelid about that kind of thing, but back then it was 1965 after all!

The champagne corks started popping early in the morning, and by the afternoon it was time for cocktails. When evening arrived, the fires were lit for barbecues, and then even later the party really got into full swing—and it kept on going and going until—Very late!

There were always all kinds of theme parties and costume parties going on, mostly in people's private homes. I also remember that there was a favorite tradition on the Island called the "Sixish." Groups of people of all types went wandering around looking for liquor, love and loud music. Every day the party moved to a different house, and party-goers would move around from one place to the next, wherever the breeze blew them. They used to set up huge, elaborate tents on the beach, like something out of the time of the Roman orgies mixed with gladiators. Weekends on the island were madness, but the best kind of fun you can imagine.

An invitation to Fire Island was an invitation I could never refuse. I would simply grab my sandals, my bathing suit and my pullover, and one way or another I would make my way there. As many as 45,000 people flocked to the tiny island over a weekend. Most caught the train out of Penn Station, and hopped on the ferry boat. For the fortunate few—like us—there was another way: A private seaplane.

The plane would land on the island, and then a four-wheel-drive jeep would take us to Kenneth's 5-bedroom beach home. It was a thrill to travel that way, and it was an incredible place to stay. The house was tucked away, far from the maddening crowds, right on the dunes in the Pines. Spectacular! Fire Island was a paradise for forward-thinking people, for bohemians, artists and hippies, and it was a non-stop party every weekend.



People like Tennessee Williams and Rock Hudson were there, as well as Elizabeth Taylor, Bette Midler and Andy Warhol—to name just a few. There were fashion designers like Giorgio St. Angelo and Calvin Klein. All kinds of people—the oddballs and the creatives, the musicians and the dancers—what a collection!

Everywhere there would be posters advertising music and theatre, like this one:

--HAPPENING TONIGHT--

“Tom Potocki and Gary Winters, artists about Fire Island, blow their artistic minds and invite other islanders to do the same when they stage their Fire Island happening, ‘Plastic Grass,’ at the Seaview recreation area on the bay tonight, starting at 6 p.m. Potocki and Winters have gone through their entire life savings to stage tonight’s thing and urge everyone to show their sympathy by arriving at least ten minutes late. Lighting, courtesy The Moon. Howls, courtesy Sunken Forest.”

The Difference between Italian and Jewish Balls

It was during one memorable weekend in this magical place that I met two of the most enchanting people I've ever met: Bernie and Evelyn. Bernie was an eminent and successful attorney in Washington, and Evelyn was a true artist and a bohemian at heart; she was a trend-

setting designer, and much of her work was on display in the Decoration and Design Building in New York, which is like the Louvre or the Tate Gallery for interior designers. They both lived in a penthouse in New York City on East 64th and Park Avenue. They also owned a villa in Italy, and they summered in Europe—either in their villa, or on their island in Switzerland. They were refined human beings saturated in culture, socialites of the highest caliber, jet-setters, and lovers of life. What a privilege to have met them on that crazy island!



From the moment we met, we hit it off. I used to call them 'Bernardo and Evelina,' my Italian names for my Jewish-adopted family. Yes, I adopted them, and this is how it happened: One night we were on the island, drinking heavily, and I was telling them all about my parents, and how I felt that they had failed to educate me on the finer things in life, even on Italian culture; how they never understood the kind of person I was, and how narrow their horizons had always been. After I

finished sharing my family's story, I told them in a jokingly way, "I wish I could adopt you as my parents!". After saying this, I couldn't believe how lightheartedly they took it; they immediately agreed that it was a wonderful idea and, as soon as we got back to the city, they invited me to their penthouse.

That marked the beginning of endless parties and luxury extravaganza. Bernie and Evelyn had two sons, Jed and Mathew, who had left the nest to go to college. So, they had left behind two empty bedrooms in the penthouse that Bernie and Evelyn didn't know what to do with. Luckily, we had already bonded deeply, just like family, so I became the perfect candidate to fill the empty space in their life. Deep inside I felt like these were *my people*, and they felt the same way about me.

The socialite couple used to throw lavish soirees every Sunday. It was a regular event that took up the entire day, and it was always so dazzling, and so mind-expanding that it made my head spin. The entire day would be filled with entertaining conversations with personalities from the bustling New York art scene. Those Sundays changed my life in so many ways: they opened my eyes to things I had never heard about; things that expanded my knowledge of culture, art, literature, and my view of the world and all its secrets.

Each Sunday at the penthouse Bernie would have their staff ready to cook, clean, cater and welcome Broadway stars, the theatre people, the journalists, the authors, the gorgeous models, and even the attorneys and businessmen would arrive. From eleven in the morning until two in the afternoon was the brunch party. After the brunch group left, then from three

o'clock to six pm another group would arrive for cocktails and hors-d'oeuvres. Around seven-thirty the next group would come in – always 12 people for a formal dinner—and since I was part of the family, I was always invited and welcomed at Bernie and Evelyn's home. After the party was over, I'd head back home and try to sleep for a bit, so I could go back to work at Kenneth's on Monday.

During these parties, Bernie and Evelyn introduced me to many incredible people. Their circle of friends and acquaintances included everyone who was part of the most intimate underground culture in New York City. The guests always knew which books one should read, which Broadway or off-Broadway productions were worthwhile, and which weren't. They knew everything about the arts, music and movies, literature and poetry – and I soaked it all up, learning everything I could.

How did an Italian boy from Connecticut end up there? you may ask. Well, I still don't know, but I'm forever grateful to those two graceful and generous people—my Jewish mommy and daddy, who took me into their lives, showered me with blessings and cared for me as one of their own sons. I remember that every now and then, whenever I looked confused or just spaced out, Evelyn would say, “Bernie, you want to talk to Antonio about this or that,” and Bernie would take me into his study, sit down with me to a cognac and cigar, and we would have a father/son talk. He would give me the kind of guidance and support that my Italian father, Carmino, never gave me. This truly is the blessing that every young man desires from his father, but few ever receive. It would not be until decades later, after meeting Robert Bly and the Men's Movement, that I would be involved with thousands of healthy men who would mentor youth and elders ... But that's another chapter yet to be written.

Oh, I almost forgot! So, what is the difference between Italian and Jewish balls?... The soup! It's all in the chicken soup! Italians have meatballs, and Jewish people have matzah balls, but the chicken soup is identical. Well, perhaps that's not the most philosophical of questions, but it's the one I remember most clearly from all those thousands of conversations around that dinner table.

"Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" – and Me

Looking back over the story of your own life is always going to be very different from living through it in the moment. Things that once happened to me make a lot more sense to me now

that I have more understanding. I can clearly see how I attracted everything I wanted to experience into my life, right on time.

The trouble is, when you're young, you don't always know what you really want. Most of us have all the wrong ideas about what's best in life when we set out to 'discover ourselves.' That was true of the younger me in NYC.

I believe that the only way to find your calling is to be gutsy, and to flow with the experiences that come your way, and try to learn from them, no matter where they take you. That attitude has always served me well.

My experiences while I worked at Kenneth's took me on new and unexpected byways, and I was soaking it all in, enjoying every turn. The 1960's in New York were a thrilling time and place to be alive. While part of me was completely overwhelmed by the lifestyles of the rich and famous, another part of me was quickly learning to see beyond the glamorous façade. It took time for me to realize that, though—so let me tell you about some of the amazing things that happened to me during this period of my life.



Lauren Bacall - The Star of the Show

One of Kenneth's favorite customers was Lauren Bacall – the famous actress with the deep, smoky voice that all the men found so attractive. Not so many people knew about how hard she had actually had to work to overcome her shyness, and get that voice just right. In her first screen test she was so nervous that she was shaking. To stop the jitters, she used to tuck her chin towards her chest, and flutter her eyes up to the camera—and somehow that became her "look."

In reality she was just a girl from the Bronx, and the name she was given at birth was Betty Joan Perske – but by the time I got to know her, she was a powerful and glamorous star. She had married Humphrey Bogart, and starred in the Cinema comedy *How to Marry a Millionaire* with Marilyn Monroe and Betty Grable—and she was one of the queens of Hollywood and NYC. When she was at the Salon, everybody knew it. She knew exactly what she wanted, and dominated everyone in the room. Her personal energy filled up the place.

When she arrived at the Salon, she brought an entourage with her—no one brought an entourage into Kenneth's like Bacall! And she was always bossing them around, and talking loudly on the phone at the same time. The shy girl from the Bronx was long gone.

While she was the star of the Broadway hit *Applause*, Rosemary and I attended to her hair, and we visited her luxurious apartment in the Dakota building many times. Each time I went there, I was in awe. The place had a 70-foot central hall, thirteen-foot-high ceilings, and the views from the many of the rooms caught the treetops of Central Park and the Manhattan cityscape.

As I looked out over the scene from what felt like the castle windows, with the sunlight catching the treetops and the vibrant city beyond that, I could feel something stirring within me. Those were magical NYC moments, forever burned into my memory.

Lucille Ball – A Box of Tricks

The 'laundry list' of glitzy clients at Kenneth's was a long one. Hollywood stars and the wives of Millionaires were at the Salon on a daily basis. A favorite customer was Lucille Ball—most people know her as the comedic star of *I love Lucy*, back in the day. It was one of the most-loved shows of all time.



Lucille Ball with John Wayne in *I love Lucy*.

I still clearly remember the first time I met her.

She had just jetted in from L.A., and had come directly to Kenneth's. She crashed through the doors and yelled her usual greeting to Kenneth at the top of her voice: "WHERE'S GOD?"

That would always produce fits of laughter all around the Salon. It was just her way of creating a stir, and livening up the place. She was just as entertaining in person as she was on the Television. It was a breath of fresh air to see how easily and lightly she carried her fame, and she was truly 'larger than life.'

Incidentally, she was the first woman to run a major television studio—a strong feminine character—and she became the mentor to many aspiring stars, including Carol Burnett.

There were many remarkable people that I had the privilege to meet and learn from during that time. I got to bask in their glowing charisma and style, while at the same time I learned much about myself too. Maybe a little bit of that energy and charisma rubbed off on me – maybe mine rubbed off on them – who can say?

Brooke Astor – A Grand Dame

One of my fondest memories is the day we were invited to chez Astor – the Park Avenue penthouse home of Brooke Astor, wife of the incredibly wealthy philanthropist, Vincent Astor. Their home occupied the entire 16th and part of the 15th floors of 788 Park Ave. It had six terraces, five fireplaces and views of Park Avenue and East Central Park. Kenneth and myself, with 18 other guests, had lunch there.



Image source: [nymag](#)

The place was a masterpiece of architecture, design and art. I had never seen anything quite so magnificent before. Every inch was a wonder to behold--but best of all, Mrs. Astor was truly a remarkable lady— a Grand Dame, if ever there was one.

Besides giving away millions of dollars to worthy causes, she had a [lifetime interest](#) in Chinese culture, even learning to speak the language, and she felt a deep affinity for Buddhism. You wouldn't know it to look at her—she was the perfect New York socialite—but I could pick up on it subconsciously.

She carried her immense wealth with an air of grace. I remember once when she was having her hair colored, watching her place her necklace, bracelets and rings right next to the sink. They were bedecked with diamonds and emeralds, and I thought to myself: "What if one of them goes down the drain?" To her it may as well have been a bowl of rice.

What was I doing among these incredibly rich and famous people? Obviously something in me was attracting these experiences although I didn't know what it was. Perhaps it was pure luck, or maybe it was fate, I didn't know.

At the time it was a fad among the super-rich and famous to bring along their hairdressers to the next party or to an opening-night, or a special event.

My neighbors at the time were getting used to the sight of a Rolls Royce pulling up outside my humble apartment building. Perhaps they thought I was crooked, or vain, or egotistical, or just very lucky, I can't be sure. More than likely they were simply jealous – you know how small-minded people can be sometimes – they hold grudges against the good fortune of others, and it keeps them trapped in their small lives.

I didn't feel like I was someone special, I was just a hairdresser—and for me it was pure adventure, and a chance to savor a completely different kind of life to the one I had known so far. I could see beneath the disguise. The super-rich were just people, like everyone else.

The neighbors would hang out of their windows and yell: "Hey Antonio! Where are you off to this time? Is it Paris?"

Little did they know I was off to the Hamptons in a seaplane to experience glamour, parties and mansions.

My life was filled with beauty and adventure in the years between 1965 and 1974, when I sailed to Europe. Between Fire Island, parties, invitations, work and my adopted Jewish family Sundays—every single day was filled to the brim with experiences I would not trade for gold, or anything else in life.

CHAPTER 4: Searching for Meaning

"Life is only real, then, when I am."

G.I. Gurdjieff

During my time in New York I lived a surreal kind of life, like something out of the movies, or from a poetic Simon and Garfunkel song, or an artistic novel. It didn't always feel like it was really happening to me.

It seemed to me that each and every day was filled to overflowing with new experiences, with strange new people, and new things to learn. Despite all the wonder, though, and even at the height of my career at Kenneth's, it still felt like something important was missing—and that surprised me.

I wasn't feeling that warm glow of inner satisfaction; and my sense of self was becoming more and more divided. Whatever temporary satisfaction I did happen to find seldom lasted, and none of it felt authentic or real, on the deepest level. There was a lot of fun, make no mistake, but I craved something more.

Instead of bliss, I was filled with uncertainty about myself and my future, and I was becoming disillusioned. The whole thing began to feel meaningless. My life felt empty—even as "full" as it was. What was I doing there? What did it all mean? What was my purpose as a human being? Was it just to color hair and attend parties at mansions, and have a good time?

Big Questions

There was a gaping hole in my emotional and spiritual life, and I didn't know how to fill it. I didn't even know where to begin.

The super-rich lived a god-like existence, surrounded by fame, money and luxury, and it was extraordinary to be a part of that scene; but there was something deeper within me that was calling out for expression, and that inner voice needed to be heard. Much as I tried to ignore it, the feeling wouldn't go away. It was like an itch that couldn't be scratched.

The clients at Kenneth's were like modern-day Royalty, and the salon was their Royal Court, and I felt like the Jester—the Jokerman, or the fool. This was not where I wanted to end up working until I was an old man.

There was something confusing at work inside me, somewhere in my hidden self. At the center of it, deep down, was the feeling that I simply wasn't good enough. It felt like tremendous internal pressure was building up, with no chance of release – and it was starting to show in little ways. My frustration could not be hidden. There were small outbursts, miniature explosions of discontent, and I was starting to get physically sick from it too.



Nancy Sinatra, 1968

Nancy Sinatra and Ethel Kennedy, two of Kenneth's regular famous clients, had both become fond of me, and we had developed a close friendship. Between all the Hollywood Queens and the celebrity Princesses, they were the most *human* of the lot. Both of them could see that I was unravelling at the edges. They were both kind and supportive to me, which I appreciated, but there was little they could do.

Those who knew me, like Bernie and Evelyn, could see that something was wrong with me. I was trying very hard to fit in, to become a success, to become a "*somebody*," and there was an explosive energy in me that would burst out unexpectedly from time to time.

It was as if something in my emotional energy was blocked up, like the cork of a champagne bottle holding back the pressure, and it was about to pop.

My Out-of-Body Experience – a Guiding Light

I eventually got so emotionally exhausted that I came down with a fever. That evening I decided to go to bed early, feeling emotionally low, depressed, sorry for myself, and in a strange, unsettled state of mind.

As I drifted off into my feverish dreams, I could feel waves of emotion and confusion sweep over me, until I finally dropped off into a fitful sleep, through the nightmares. But the strange experience didn't stop there.

Next thing I knew I had the most peculiar sensation. It felt like I was leaving my body.

I felt myself rise up out of my physical form, like a ghostly ethereal being, up towards the ceiling. There I was, floating like a balloon, looking down at myself, still fast asleep. I watched my chest rise and all as my body breathed. I had never experienced anything like this before, but in a way, it felt completely natural too.

I instantly knew that I was leaving my body, maybe even for good. As I drifted off, I was wrestling with the decision whether to keep going – up through the roof, to who knows where, or whether I should return to my body, and to my life.

(I didn't know much about it at the time, but I've since learned that it is called an “out-of-body experience,” or OBE, and it is estimated that between 10% and 25% of people experience something like this at least once in life. It often happens in that place in between sleep and wakefulness, called the hypnagogic state, or when people are emotionally or spiritually pressured.) It was such a powerful shock, and a moment of the deepest self-realization. My intuition knew exactly what the choice meant, and some part of my core-being knew that I could not leave yet. I needed to discover something important—and I also knew exactly what I was looking for.

I understood in that timeless moment that I had to know the REAL meaning of what it meant to be TRULY HAPPY.

Somehow I realized that if I left that day, I would simply have to come back and start all over again. That was an idea that didn't appeal to me, but I wasn't even sure how I was able to think about it at all. It was more like a direct *knowing, the way I knew my own breath*, and much more than just a fever-dream.

As the realization dawned on me, I was already sinking back down towards my body, and then I woke up with a jolt, fully aware, and conscious of what had just happened. It was suddenly crystal clear to me what I had to do: I had to go to San Francisco, where I would find the answers to my

questions. I knew without a shred of doubt that I needed to quit my job at Kenneth's before I lost my soul.

The deep knowledge filled me with a renewed sense of meaning, almost like a Peak Experience. Life no longer seemed dull and empty—it seemed full of magic again.

My Decision was Final

When I woke up in the morning, my fever was gone, and I felt fantastic. I had so much energy that I felt capable of picking up the entire world and slinging it over my shoulder like a satchel. A new journey was beginning, and my feet were itchy.

That morning Nancy Sinatra was my first client at Kenneth's, and I told her what had happened to me the night before.

I always thought of Nancy as a kind of goddess, but she was also such a down-to-earth person, and when she heard my story, she was very even-minded about the subject. As I prepared her hair color, I described my experience, and she listened carefully to the whole episode. Only when I was done did she speak:

"It's a rare thing to have such an awakening." She told me, "You need to follow your calling, and follow your bliss— which will show you your destiny. Don't worry about Rosemary and the salon; there are more important things in life."

As if on cue in a stage play, Rosemary came over and told me that Kenneth wanted to see me in his private office at noon, before I went out on lunch. The morning flew by, and before I knew it, there I was, standing in front of Kenneth, ready to tell him about my plans to leave.

What a strange twist of fate. He was about to offer me a promotion—and he was forcing me to choose, even though he had no idea of what was on my mind.

First he praised me for my hard work and my talent. He told me that many of his top clients liked my work, and they thought I had an enthusiastic attitude, which they enjoyed. Rita, the botanist and hair-care product specialist had said just that week that Jackie O had praised me, and that I was her favorite. Kenneth wanted to move me up to the fourth floor, and give me my very own coloring room, no longer reporting directly to Rosemary. I would get my own clients, which he would hand-pick for me.

I was speechless, and could only stare at him blankly.

It felt like the universe was holding its breath, waiting for my answer. On the one hand was this wonderful new opportunity, but on the other hand—San Francisco was calling me to new adventures. I felt like I was back in my childhood, on that hilltop, or during those times I ran away into the big wide world. The choice was obvious: It was no choice at all.

The words just spilled out of my mouth.

"I'm leaving New York, and I'm going to move to San Francisco." I said.

Now it was Kenneth's turn to be dumbstruck. This was not what he was expecting. I was supposed to be thrilled, and grateful – but here I was, turning him down, and handing in my notice instead! When it dawned on him what was happening, he became furious.

"Have you gone mad?!" he shouted at me.

I could only stand there, smiling sheepishly, and somehow try to explain my motives—but he wasn't listening.

"Anyone in your shoes would cut off their left arm to get an opportunity like this!"

Kenneth was red in the face as he turned up the heat. "You will be one of the top hair colorists in the world. Are you insane? You can't turn this down, after everything I've done for you!"

As he launched his tirade at me, I just became completely calm, and even more determined to do what I knew was right. The energy I had contacted during my OBE was settling firmly into some part of my interior, and my decision was made. I walked out of the office while Kenneth was still shouting at the top of his lungs.

Back at the coloring station I explained what had just happened to Nancy. All kinds of conflicting emotions surged through me, but my decision had been made. Nancy tucked a \$100 bill into my hand, smiling kindly at me, and said:

"Don't worry about a thing – forget about Kenneth and Rosemary – you've found your calling, and you have to follow it. BE TRUE TO YOURSELF, Child.

Back in 1968 that \$100 bill would be enough to buy my one-way ticket. It was more than enough, so the pathway just opened up like magic. I walked out of Kenneth's more determined than ever, and started making plans to leave right away.

The Big Apple was an amazing place, no doubt, but flamboyant San Francisco was characterized by hippy street life, buskers, bongo players and everywhere you went, impressive bouffants thronged the City by the Bay. The rock music there was known as the San Francisco Sound. There was an incredible sub-culture, which has become world-famous since then.

Yes, something was calling me in that deep mystical way I had “heard” before. Was it the Scott McKenzie song "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)," a number one hit in 1967? And while New York was a melting pot of many cultures, and a mixture of many things, San Francisco was a magnet for the hippie culture. Was that magnet pulling me West? I kept having an intuition that my life’s learning and adventure were to continue in the City by the Bay.

A lot was happening. The year 1968 was also the year that the US launched the Tet offensive in Vietnam, and the protest movement was strong in San Francisco. Jackie O married Ari Onassis that year.

There was so much going on at that point in history, and in my own personal life, that sometimes I almost completely forgot why I had moved to San Francisco in the first place. But as you will see in the next chapter, something was still guiding me in mysterious ways, towards a higher destiny.

After I left Kenneth’s, the attraction to San Francisco became very strong. And so, leaving my wonderful life in New York, I hopped a plane.

Chapter 5: San Francisco: Flowers and Hair



When I arrived in San Francisco I was met at the airport by an enthusiastic bunch of friends. The next leg of my life journey was underway, and I couldn't wait to find out what was going to happen next.

I informed all my friends that this time it was going to be more than just a short visit. I told them that I was planning to make the city my permanent home—at least temporarily—although, to be honest, I hadn't figured out exactly how I was going to do that yet.

One of my friends immediately offered to rent me a room in his house. It was close to Coit Tower, North Beach, and Telegraph Hill, and in a swanky neighborhood, right in the throbbing hub of art and bohemian culture. I accepted gratefully, and just like that, the city became my new home.

The hills were full of buskers, artists, and weirdly outfitted flower children. Street cafes were buzzing with music and color. Haight Ashbury was overflowing with a brand new, open-minded kind of energy, and it was exhilarating for a young man in his twenties, like me.

This was 1969, and I was in exactly the right place, at exactly the right time.

The music in the City by the Bay was on the cutting edge of the rock and folk scene. Fillmore West was where all the great bands performed, and the psychedelic rock sound was fast becoming a part of mainstream American and World culture. It was groovy, man, it was far out. Haight Ashbury bands such as the Grateful Dead, and Jefferson Airplane were becoming famous all over the country. There was such a free and open spirit in the city, despite all of the problems of that decade, and the inevitable clashes of culture.

North Beach was a mixture of regular American working-class families, combined with the more exotic Chinatown area – the oldest Chinatown in the country, and Little Italy. The place had an international feel, and there were all kinds of people. It was a wonderful place to live.

In Golden Gate Park there was a constant stream of young adult conversation about overthrowing the establishment – everyone had their own opinions, and there was a strong undercurrent of youth empowerment. "The Diggers" were a group of people who started street theatre in the area, and they believed in a free society, and that basically everybody was good, deep down. They ran soup kitchens, gave away clothes, and ran a free medical clinic. People called them "community anarchists." It was a crazy mix. Everyone was convinced that it would turn into a new world order. Revolution was in the air, mixed in with the smells of hash and incense, and the sounds of the late sixties.



The little bit of money I had didn't last very long, so I needed to start looking for a job. But as luck would have it, my credentials from my apprenticeship at Kenneth's counted in my favor, and Elizabeth Arden agreed to interview me for a job as their Color Director, for the entire North West Region.

My original reason for coming to San Francisco was put on the backburner, as I got sucked into the new lifestyle, the new social circles, the parties and the night life. I was already being invited to the homes of super-rich clients, and Elizabeth Arden got back to me, agreed to hire me, and invited me to a cocktail party. I was to meet key members of the management team, and the upper crust of San Francisco society.

But, as fate would have it, on the way to that party I was sidetracked by destiny.

Destiny Creates a Detour

As I walked through Washington Park, I suddenly got an odd craving for Italian food. It got so overwhelming that I had to do something about it. I stopped at one of the top Italian restaurants in the area and ordered a pasta and eggplant. It was near lunchtime, if I remember correctly.

The strange thing was, when the food arrived, I suddenly realized that I wasn't actually hungry. It was terribly confusing. I just paid the bill and walked out without touching the food, wondering about the strange craving.

It felt like my mind was clouded, even though I was dead sober.

I have to be honest: There was a lot of pot smoking, "recreation," and drinking in the San Francisco parks, even on weekdays. That was just part of life in those days, and as they say, if you remember the sixties, you weren't really there. But this was something else. This feeling was completely different.

What did it mean? I shrugged, but kept walking and walking, almost in a daze. Weirdly, the craving for Italian food didn't go away, even though I knew I wasn't hungry. Before I knew it, I had walked into another restaurant, and I was looking through the menu.

"What am I doing?" I asked myself, and had to make up an excuse when the waiter arrived. I told him I didn't have time for lunch, and just walked out again, embarrassed.

I was heading up Beacon Hill, without a clue as to where I was going – but it felt like I was going in the right direction—don't ask me how I knew. Perhaps it was some kind of 'cosmic' homing beacon, or maybe just coincidence, or luck. I had heard of stranger things in San Francisco, and my mind and heart were open to whatever came my way. I went with the flow of the moment.

I just followed the feeling, and kept walking. I had already forgotten all about Elizabeth Arden and the press party. Something was guiding me, and I could feel the strings of destiny tugging at my soul. It was completely illogical, but it felt right.

Next thing I knew I was at a church, and on the left side there was a door, leading to a corridor, and a flight of steps leading down into the basement below. I followed my instincts, and went down the stairs.

At the bottom there was a group of people, maybe forty or more, all sitting in a circle, deeply engrossed in conversation. I found an empty seat and sat down in the circle, feeling like this is where my intuition had been leading me. Nobody seemed to mind.

As I started listening to what the group was discussing, I became more and more intrigued. People would take turns speaking, and one would ask: "What is your question?" – To which there would be a reply. Then certain members of the group would probe deeper, asking: "Is that a real question?" – and there would be a discussion from different points of view, going deeper into the esoteric mysteries that opened up beyond each question. I had never heard people talk in this way before.

Some of the people in the circle were talking about the leader of their group, and calling him a "Real Conscious Being." They said that he was available to discuss what they called "real questions."

I had one of those. I wanted to know *what would make me HAPPY.*

They announced that there would be another meeting on the following Sunday, at the same place and time, and there was an open invitation to bring along as many interested people as we could find. The

more people in the discussion, the more energy, and the greater the possibilities. That was good news for me, and I felt as if I was on the path to discovering the truth I was yearning for.

After quite a long session, lasting a few hours, the meeting was called to an end. I had completely forgotten all about my appointment with Elizabeth Arden, but it didn't matter to me, because as I kept listening to these people, I felt more and more as if I had found exactly what I was supposed to find. After all, what had called me to San Francisco was no ordinary curiosity—it was a deep metaphysical drive. The sense of discovery now filled me with good feelings. I felt like I was ten feet off the ground, and that the pieces of the puzzle were starting to fit together. I was like a bloodhound that had picked up the scent.

During that week I spoke to a lot of people about my experience and invited all of them to come along and find out more with me. I even gave out flyers. The whole strange experience in that church basement filled my mind, and I could think of nothing else. There was a kind of longing in me that didn't have a name, and a kind of *knowing* that I was about to find out.

I'm sure my friends thought I was insane, and to be honest, there was a part of me that wondered whether or not I had lost some of my marbles. Nevertheless, I was utterly determined to meet this "conscious being" – whoever he was. I was convinced that he would be able to satisfy my curiosity, and answer my deepest questions.

I even handed out flyers at the Revlon headquarters. I had to make up an excuse for missing the press party, though. I pretended that there had been an emergency, and apologized profusely, saying that we should organize another event. Most of them must have thought I was a lunatic, but it didn't matter to me.

I remember handing a flyer to one woman in particular, and then immediately regretting it. I recognized her as Elizabeth Arden's Mrs. Esperanza. There was something distasteful about her, and I didn't really want to be associated with her. I have to admit, it was misplaced egotism—but I was young and stupid. I remember thinking to myself that I really hoped she didn't actually come to the meeting, because it would be embarrassing, but I consoled myself with the knowledge that in all likelihood, nobody would show up anyway.

As the days of that strange week ticked by I became a little bit obsessed. I was counting the hours until my next date with destiny. Odd sensations coursed through me—it felt like *déjà vu*. It was almost as if all of this had happened before, many times before, in fact. I couldn't describe it exactly, and I knew it defied explanation. But there was a part of me deep down that needed to find out. It was the genesis of my self-realization, and it felt like new panoramas of experience were unfolding inside me.

A Date with Destiny in the Basement Circle

When Sunday finally arrived, I headed to the church early. The meeting was scheduled for 4:00 pm, but by 3:30 I was already arranging the chairs into a circle. As the others started arriving, we were all in high spirits. This was it! I was finally going to find out.

I looked around the room, and it was quickly filling up. Not a single person I had invited had shown up, but that didn't bother me. I found a chair, and sat down. The meeting was about to start, and it was announced that some people would be invited to 'the mountaintop' where the master was.

Then I noticed the woman from Revlon, Mrs. Esperanza, walk through the door—the very person that I had hoped would *not* arrive! She looked around the room, and when she saw me she headed right over. There was an open seat next to me, and she sat down quietly, without saying a word.

I felt uneasy and a little apprehensive. What would people think of me? I hoped she wouldn't say anything that embarrassed me too much. She didn't look very enlightened.

The meeting got underway, and again, people started asking questions and discussing them, each person in the circle getting a turn to speak. Then Mrs. Esperanza stood up to speak, and I felt like I wanted to grab hold of her and physically pull her back down into her seat.

But the strangest thing happened.

As she began to speak, the entire room fell completely silent. Nobody could believe the words coming out of her mouth. She spoke so eloquently, and with such conviction about the subject, and it was clear that she was probably more spiritually awakened than the so-called 'leaders' in the group.

She spoke for a long time, and everyone's attention was fixed on her the entire time. There was such wisdom and truth in what she was saying. When she stopped talking, even the most senior member of the group had questions for her.

What a fool I had been! The one person who had the most to say was the one I had been embarrassed to sit next to. Now I suddenly felt proud about inviting her, but I also felt a bit mystified. Who was this woman, really?

Someone was offering to actually pay her to come and speak, and to answer questions for the group of spiritual seekers. They had never heard anything like it, either.

"We seldom pay anyone to come and teach us, but in your case we will make an exception. Whatever you want, we'll pay it, just please come and answer our questions up on the mountain." He was saying.

Mrs. Esperanza was not interested. She confidently and patiently explained herself:

"I'm a mother of three, and my husband and my family need my time and my energy," she said in a matter-of-fact way, without any pretense. "I have absolutely no interest in attending your mountain gatherings, or meeting your enlightened leader. I came here for one reason only."

Then she turned to look at me, and everyone in the room looked at me. too. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"I came here to tell my new friend, Antonio, just one thing." She said.

It felt as if the whole room was holding its breath.

"You see," she continued, "when I met him, he invited me here, and I immediately knew I had to say something to him. But I also knew that if I told him there and then, that he would not listen. I had to come here, and stand in front of all you, his new circle of friends, and get all of your attention. Only then would he really listen, and pay attention to what I had to say."

And it's true. What she said to me then has stuck with me for life, through all my adventures, all my searching, and all my personal development. In the next chapter I will share that simple secret with you, and I'll also tell you all about my trip to meet the "master" on the mountain top.

Mrs. Esperanza remains a mystery to me, even to this day. I'm still not sure how she knew what to say, or why she felt she needed to say anything to me at all—but she did, and it had a massive impact. As we sat in that circle in the basement, she looked me straight into my eyes, and simply said to me: "BE YOURSELF." It was as if I were hearing a GOD/DESS speaking to me saying "BE YOURSELF." Hearing this brought me into a higher state of consciousness as if I were watching all that was going on outside myself, somehow having an OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE.

The entire room was silent, and those two words of hers struck me with great force. The words themselves are innocent enough. To be quite honest, they're even a bit of a cliché, and I've heard them a hundred times since then, though never in quite the same way. At that particular moment those words seemed to contain more than what is possible to convey in everyday language, even if I spoke for hours. Something inside me just clicked into place. Again and again, whenever I hear just a powerful title, I realize there is no need to read the whole book: *When you get the message, hang up the phone.*

Upon hearing her say it, I suddenly entered a state of altered consciousness. It was a kind of heightened awareness, a deeper energy field, as if time itself stood still, and as if my mind was suddenly operating on a different frequency. I sat there, stunned, but fully awake, for the longest time, with a deep sense of self-realization coming over me in waves.

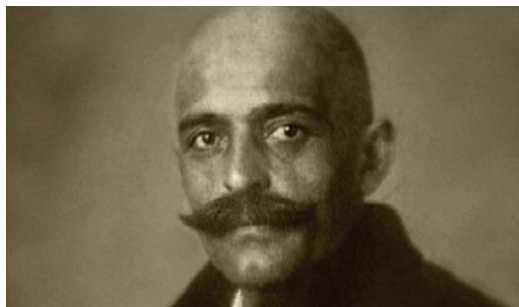
Mrs. Esperanza was saying how she arrived here from Italy after World War II with her Father, and how she saw the horror of war and that her beloved country's soil was soaked in blood from all of the murdering and horror she had witnessed. She went on to say that if America did not WAKE UP it would soon be the same here: more senseless killings by unconscious beings. She also added that she had no interest in being part of our group nor any group, that she had a husband and three children who needed her more than any of us needed her. She was not interested in being paid for her words of wisdom and reiterated that the only reason she came to this meeting was that she was certain that I would completely hear her words if spoken in front of my friends. Therefore, she was only here to tell Antonio "BE YOURSELF."

When my mental state returned to normal, more or less, I noticed that she had already left the room. I asked one of the other ladies present to check the ladies restroom and see if she was there, but it was no use; I knew someplace deep down inside myself that she had vanished: Mrs. Esperanza was gone, and though I searched everywhere for her, hoping to get some kind of explanation about what had happened, I never saw her again.

The Inner Circle

The following weekend a trip was arranged to the mountain, where the new inner group was to meet up with the 'Master.' It was said that he was a deeply knowledgeable and highly conscious individual. He could speak on the most widely divergent subjects, and he was going to teach us about the secrets of consciousness. I was intrigued. It was exactly what I was looking for. Now that I was given the Secret Elixir I was ready for any adventure and "BE YOURSELF" was echoing inside my very being. I felt magnetized once again knowing this was the Journey I was searching for.

Those of us that were invited were expected to read certain books before we went. I'd never heard of these books. One of them was entitled *In Search of the Miraculous*, and it was written by a Russian—P.D. Ouspensky. He in turn was a student of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. I didn't know it at the time, but these ideas would later inspire a lot of growth in me. Gurdjieff would take me to another dimension and create a search in me that would bring me halfway around the World and back again to face myself, so I could "BE MYSELF."



I later came to know more about the teachings and the life of this great man, Gurdjieff, who would become my First Real Spiritual Teacher. He was one of the most influential spiritual teachers of the twentieth century, even though he wasn't very well known, probably because in those days during the early 1900's, when he was alive, there were no iphones, or Google, or Twitter. As a young man Gurdjieff travelled the world widely, on expeditions in search of truth, and he went to great lengths in search of ancient spiritual teachings. Some of these journeys are described in his book *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.

It was rumored that Mr. Gurdjieff had gone to and studied with the same ancient Monasteries that Jesus Christ was claimed to have studied with. It is known that Jesus Christ disappeared from age 13 to 30 and it was during this time it was mentioned that Jesus traveled from one brotherhood monastery to another in Search of the Miraculous!

His quest led him to the secretive Sarmoung brotherhood, among many other teachers and remarkable individuals, and he developed a unique system of teaching. I could describe him as part guru, part mystic, part scientist, and part dance instructor. I wished I had got the chance to meet him, but sadly he died in 1949. Yet, I was soon to meet and to study with the so-called 1st-People. These are folks who actually lived and studied with Mr. Gurdjieff during the last years of his life.

The man we were going to meet on the mountain was supposedly one of Gurdjieff's students, and he claimed to be in possession of similar spiritual understanding and charisma. Like Ouspensky, he was supposed to teach us about the system called "The Fourth Way."

I didn't read as much of the material I was supposed to because I found the books difficult to digest at the time. They seemed interesting enough, but way too complicated. The book by Gurdjieff's student, though, was different. *In Search of the Miraculous* had a profound effect on me, and it opened my eyes to a new world. I realized that my views of religion, Catholicism in particular, and spirituality were completely inadequate, and his ideas were ringing the bells, somewhere deep inside my psyche. The one book that held my complete interest was written by Fritz Peters, "Boyhood with Gurdjieff". It was this book that peaked my interest the most and that pushed me more to where this journey was leading me to.

Instead of the usual religious dogma, which you have to believe without understanding, here were words that smacked of truth and first-hand knowledge of the ancient esoteric secrets. I will talk more about Gurdjieff later in my story--but for now let me describe what happened when I went to meet Alex Horn.

Anticipation grew all week while I went about my business at Elizabeth Arden's offices and salon. I was to join a car pool that was leaving from North Beach Park on Friday and I couldn't wait for it to happen. It felt like the start of an important journey—my personal quest for the truth, and the search for meaning and fulfilment. I wouldn't have missed that trip for the world, so when the departure time arrived, I was there, packed and ready to go. All the 'students' were divided up into cars. We set off, and we would soon be leaving San Francisco behind, heading up into the wine country in Napa, Sonoma.

Long after the sun set we arrived at Louie Martini's winery and continued up a dirt road to the top of a hill, where there was a small settlement and a couple of buildings around. We were shown to our rooms, where we crashed out, exhausted after the long drive.

I was almost certain that what everybody was so excitingly talking about was going to be exactly what I had been searching for...

Alex Horn, a Mystic or a Villain



In the morning we assembled for breakfast, and Alex made his appearance.

He was a large man, very charismatic, almost theatrical in nature, and he was smiling from ear to ear as he strode towards us. He seemed totally in control of himself, and extremely self-assured. He appeared to be open and friendly, and intimidating at the same time. We all assumed that this was what it meant to have "presence" – as the leaders in the group had been explaining it to us all along. Alex got into his discussion right away. He told us that he had purchased the property we were on from the Martini vineyards, and he had a vision of what he was going to create there--and we were going to be a part of it. This made us all thrilled, of course.

He told us why we had asked us to come, and wanted to assure us that he had found the meaning of existence. He made all kinds of promises, including showing us the fountain of youth. He bragged about how he had traveled the world, and how he had met remarkable men who showed him esoteric secrets that had transformed him into a conscious man. The alarm bells should have been ringing in my mind already, but I was in awe of this man, and still not sure about what I had gotten myself into. I was going along with it, hoping it was all true. I had finally met my first Real Conscious Being and I was going to make the most out of all of it.

Alex was an incredibly persuasive man, and he had a way with words. He had been a playwright and an actor, he was well educated, and could quote anyone from Blake to Ibsen, to the Greek classics. He was a master manipulator and could switch from being totally intimidating to being as charming and mild as a daisy in a second. It threw you off balance and you never knew what to expect from him. He started going around the group of new arrivals, asking each of us "What is your *Question?*"

As each person replied with their own ideas, he would quickly shut them down, saying that their question wasn't a 'real question' after all, and he kept challenging us to find "*The Question.*" His energy was so explosive, and so dynamic, and when he gave you his full attention, it felt like all the doubts were dissolving in your mind. We were all very impressed, and there seemed to be something solid behind his teachings, which put all the silly thoughts in our minds out of reach. Everyone else seemed small and insignificant in his presence.

His system of teaching was very loosely based on what the true master, Gurdjieff, used to do. It was a combination of transferring head knowledge through explanations and arguments and transferring something deeper through hard physical work. I spent that weekend on the hilltop and went back again the following weekend for another visit, even though I was inwardly becoming skeptical about

what Alex was teaching us. Despite my doubts, it was exhilarating to be there. We were told we were transforming grapes into wine and thus we were ourselves soon to become wine through our hard labor and insights. Alex kept promising us all that true Transformation would happen on his Hill Top Retreat Center.

We were loaded into trucks and taken to the fields where we were supposed to plant vines. It was explained to us that this work was "outer" work—and it was supposed to correspond with the work we would do on ourselves—the "real" work. These terms had been borrowed from teachings in The Fourth Way. It was like a living metaphor: as the vines would grow and mature, so would we. As the outer work would yield rewards in the form of wine, so the inner work would bring us the joys of heightened consciousness. That part made sense, and it was amazing to see it unfold.

Everyone was enthusiastic, and there was a buzz of energy that drove us to work harder than we had ever worked before. It was quite an experience. The sun was blistering, and the soil was rock hard, but we worked as if we were possessed. We amazed ourselves at how much we could lift, how long we could endure, and what we could accomplish. It was unlike anything we had experienced before. We felt superhuman. Alex oversaw the work and spurred us on to lift heavier and heavier rocks, and to work harder and harder. The energy was contagious, and we transcended ourselves, in a way. Alex and his wife, Anne Burrage, kept on telling us that we could do the impossible, and that we could do it easily. We couldn't believe what was happening. It was otherworldly.

Anne was overseeing work on a massive wall made out of stones that were collected from the surrounding area. We were lifting rocks that weighed more than a hundred pounds and carrying them around as if they were bags of groceries. We got no sleep at all, and just kept working, learning, listening to Alex, and then working some more. Alex and Anne were explaining that when you work on yourself consciously, you are able to unleash higher potentials in yourself, physically, mentally and emotionally – and from what we were experiencing, it seemed to be true. I felt incredibly, physically powerful during the whole weekend; but there was something about what they were saying that didn't sit right with me.

Alex introduced us to some ideas from the tradition of Gurdjieff, and some of what he said was absolutely true. A lot more of what he said was just the product of his imagination, and blatant lies. I came to see that his motives were not pure. He told us about his plans to set up a village in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, which was in preparation for the bleak future. He made prophecies about a coming world disaster, which would occur within the next two or three years. According to him, the economy was about to collapse, major cities would be destroyed, and the world as we knew it was coming to a catastrophic end.

Each student was expected to pay \$100 in cash to him directly, each weekend, and there was no receipt, of course. Even more alarming, he told us that if we were prepared to hand over all our worldly possessions to him, personally, we would be fast-tracked for development. That was the final straw for me! There was a lot of talk, and a lot of philosophy—and there was a unique camaraderie in the group. But Alex was a master manipulator, and it was becoming clearer to me. When he wasn't

bullying or intimidating you, he was sweet talking, and he knew exactly which buttons to push to get control over people. He had a knack for spotting people's weaknesses, and relentlessly taking advantage—all in the name of 'inner work' on yourself, or some esoteric principle or another—whichever one suited him at the time.

My misgivings about this strange place, and these strange people started growing, and I began to doubt everything I was learning. If these were truly 'conscious beings,' then why did they need all that money? Certainly, anyone who was conscious could create more money out of thin air. As amazing as it was, there was something dark and ominous about that ranch. It was clearly a cult, and nobody could say for certain what Alex and his wife's true motives were. Perhaps they were sincere, or more likely they were con artists, but as my eyes began to open, I realized that this was not the place for me.

The tension bubbled up to the surface and, on my last night there, I confronted Alex on the question of money. I wanted to know why he got the sole right to decide everything, and why he got to own everything that the community was contributing towards. There was a hot debate on the subject and, as usual, Alex rose to the occasion theatrically. He told everyone that was listening that the fault was with me. I was clearly suffering from a lack of consciousness and that he, as the only truly conscious one among us, clearly had the right to do as he pleased. Completely disillusioned and with a feeling of disgust, I walked out, gathered my belongings, and hiked down the long dirt road alone. It was clear to me that I was leaving Alex, Anne and their ranch behind, and was heading back towards San Francisco feeling elated yet mystified on how to continue my *Search for the Miraculous*.

As I trudged towards the main road, I felt a kind of elation and let out a big sigh of relief. I had surely dodged a bullet—who knows where I would have ended up with those people. But even though I had seen through their illusions, there were certain ideas that I had come across with that were calling to me. What I had discovered about Gurdjieff and his authentic teachings seemed like a bright light in comparison to what Alex and his wife had been saying. I later discovered that they had been loosely quoting from Gurdjieff and Ouspensky's teachings on the Fourth Way, and that they had invented all the rest to suit their own tastes.

Later, I would learn firsthand from Lord Pentland and Mr. John G Bennett that Alex Horn was truly a *Hassnamuissan*, a piece of shit burning itself out of the Universe, another one of Gurdjieff's made up words to explain the unexplainable. The words that had started me off on this journey still rang in my head: "BE YOURSELF." And I was determined to do exactly that. As bizarre as this 'cult' experience had been, it had shown me another important part of the puzzle—the need to work on myself, in my deepest nature. I had seen the possibilities of how unlocking the secrets of consciousness could revolutionize my life, and even if these people were charlatans, there was still some value in the whole experience, at least. More importantly, they had inadvertently introduced me to a true teacher, Gurdjieff, and I was determined to follow up on that lead.

I knew that my time in San Francisco was coming to an end, and that I had found the clues that I had needed to find. It still wasn't the final answer—in fact, I probably had more questions now than I did at the start—but I felt like I was progressing, learning, and discovering incredible new depths to life, and

they were all right there, inside me. I sensed that I was on the right track. Truly the way OUT was IN. It was a comforting feeling and as I walked, I dusted off my regrets as if they were nothing and kept heading down the road. Upon reaching the main road, I felt a relief and knew that there was a new life ahead of me. I thought about hitchhiking back to the city, but realized there were no cars on this road. So, instead, I kept walking and sang along the way, while feeling a surge of relief because I had finally found my entrance point into my Journey and learned that I would never really know what I wanted as I was discovering understanding vs knowledge. Yet, I truly found out what I *Did Not Want* and that was anything more to do with Alex Horn and his fake, false teachings. it was a green light to get out, move forward and not to go any further on this road of cultism.

My First Awakening

After what seemed hours of just walking in exhilaration, singing and feeling a true sense of what it meant to be truly happy, I suddenly heard a distant roar of a car engine heading towards me in the pitch-black road ahead. The car that was clearly going at a high speed whizzed by me at lightning speed, but then shortly came to a halt before reversing. I could hear the tires screeching as it reversed and headed back to where I was walking. The car stopped suddenly and let me get in. I got into the back seat and two young men sat in the front.

Exchanging brief introductions, it seemed that these two guys were quite stoned and headed to San Francisco and would be able to drop me off right at North Shore, which was about one block from where I lived. I sat there in silence in the back seat piecing all that had happened in just the past three days while the two new friends in the front talked all the way back to San Francisco as though I no longer existed. A few hours later we arrived in North Beach and they pulled to the side of the park to drop me off. I was elated to have gotten home so easily from that deserted road. This was truly a miracle! I offered them some money for the generosity of bringing me to my door, but they declined and simply wished me well. I wasn't going to just take "no" for an answer, so, I got my belongings together and then dropped a \$20 bill on the back seat in gratitude for being saved at the last hour.

Upon arriving home, I dropped down into bed and fell off into a deep sleep. It had almost been 72 hours since I had last slept, and all the mad happenings were spinning in my head as I slipped off to BE YOURSELF. I was back to square one, but with a new insight into Mr. Gurdiffeff's Search of the Miraculous.

When I woke up the next day the city was exactly the same as it had always been, but I could sense something new about myself, inwardly. That made all the difference.

It was as if some unknown and slightly confusing dimension of *being* had begun to open up in me, and now suddenly the everyday business of living among all these people seemed like just a thin veneer to me.

It all seemed a little bit fake. I felt like a stranger in my own skin. It was as if there was something missing, something that I could sense, but I still couldn't put a name to it, whatever it was.

My experience with Alex Horn on the mountain had shown me that it was easy to get lost if I blindly followed someone else's version of the truth, instead of listening to my own heart and my deepest intuitions. I wanted something real, not just more of the same.

I knew that I had to stay true to that authentic feeling, that particular "*something*" that was calling me from deep inside my soul. The only problem was that it was a slippery, unexplainable kind of thing-- almost like a sixth sense, or like a premonition, and I couldn't nail it down, let alone make a decision as to what to do about it.

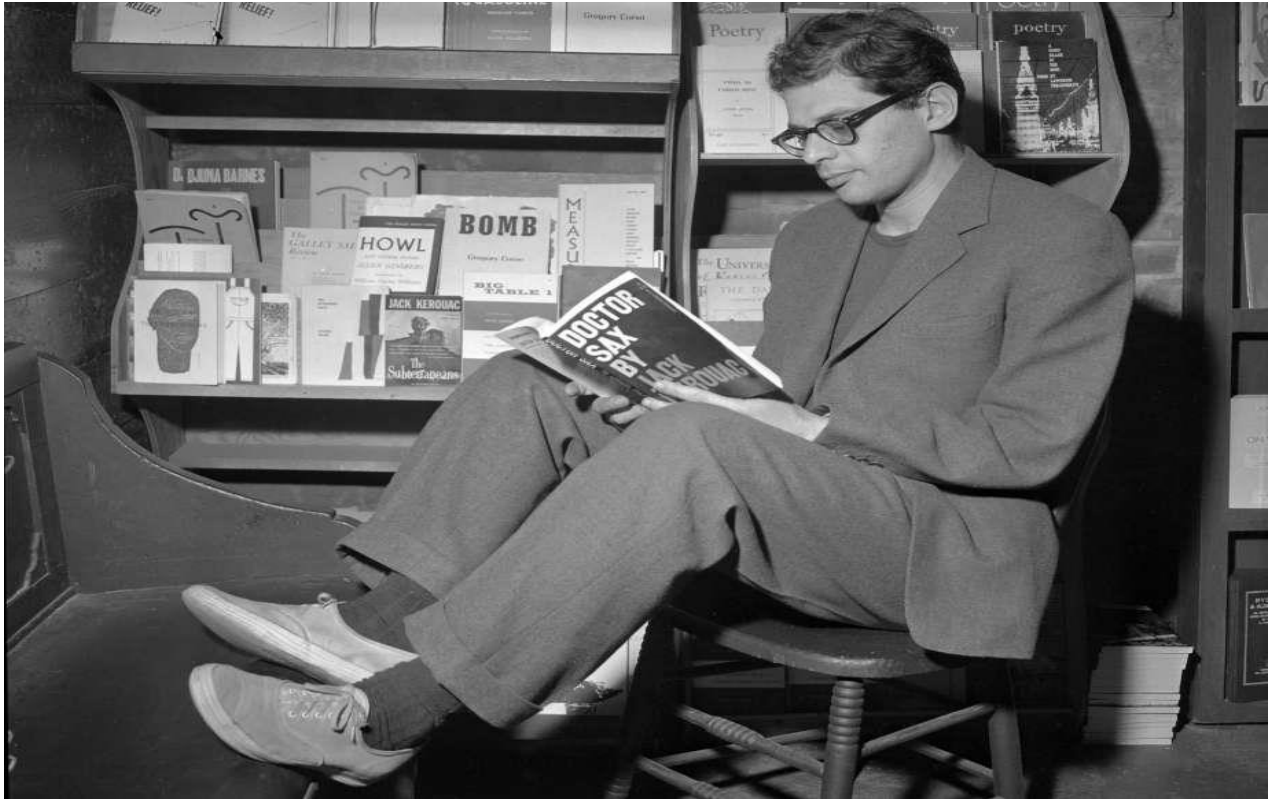
I felt as if my life was at loose ends. I made up my mind to dissolve all my ties with Elizabeth Arden's Salon, and in fact, I didn't want to work in a salon ever again. My appointments with Revlon fizzled out too, but I still had plenty of wealthy clients inviting me to their homes, at least.

I was freelancing and blowing like a leaf in the wind. My motto during that time might have read something like: "Have scissors, will travel."

The trouble was—I didn't know what I was going to do with my life next. But, as it turned out, fate had a few more surprises up its sleeve.

There was a message waiting for me from Paul Henri, who had telephoned for me while I was up on the mountain. Paul was an architect and interior designer from New York. We had met and got to know each other through my dealings with *European Craftsmen Limited*.

I called him back, and he told me that he wanted me to help him hunt for artifacts for his upcoming



Allen Ginsberg reads Jack Kerouac's novel in a San Francisco bookshop

design projects. He thought I would be the perfect person to help him, and he even offered to pay for a one-way ticket back to NYC. I accepted gladly, without hesitation. I could see that it was time for me to return to my little rent-controlled apartment, and I was ready to drift on the breeze, wherever it blew me. My time in San Francisco was coming to its inevitable conclusion, and it felt like I had come full circle. It was time to move on.

But before I boarded the plane, there was one last crazy experience that left a lasting effect on my psyche, and one that opened up my mental horizons even wider.

One Last Crazy Adventure in the San Francisco Moonlight

"Concentrate on what you want to say to yourself and your friends.

Follow your inner moonlight; don't hide the madness. You say what you want to say when you don't care who's listening."

— **Allen Ginsberg.**

If you've ever heard of Allen Ginsberg, and his famous book of psychedelic poetry called, *Howl*, or Jack Kerouac or William S. Burroughs, then you will know something of the Beat Generation, and the strange sub-culture of San Francisco of the late 60's. It was mind-expanding, to say the least.

Winds of change were blowing in from the Far East, and new seeds of metaphysical ideas were finding fertile soil in the minds of the youth, and of the crazy lost souls. People were questioning the philosophies and religions and politics of the West, and it was thrilling to be alive in that place and time.

San Francisco might be seen as liberal and open-minded today, but that was not always how it was. It used to be much more conservative. The youth of that time were fearless in challenging the old, established ideas of America. It was a free-spirited rebellion, mixed with poetry, music, and open enquiry into meditation, yoga, and mysticism, and of course, mind-expanding substances. We wanted to be free, to push the limits, and to open the "Doors of Perception." We wanted to taste life, in all its richness and magic, and to create our own kind of Utopia. We wanted to feel alive, and real, and true.

Before I left for New York, I was invited to a party in the Haight. I remember sitting in the living room of someone famous, and next thing I knew, the host was walking around with a silver tray loaded with pills, and he was nonchalantly offering them to everyone.

"This is an Upper," he was saying, "We're heading to Fillmore West, and you're all invited."

What the hell. Why not? I took one of the pills, and swallowed, as I downed my drink.

A bunch of us left the apartment, and jumped into a couple of cars and headed out. Along the way I started feeling very strange. There was an odd tingling sensation going through me, and it felt like I was slipping away, or unravelling, losing my firm grip on 'reality.'

Piercing the Veil

My first LSD experience had been in New York with a guy called Bobby. He told me the stuff would "liven up our adventure in the city." And that it certainly did.

That first trip was a strange soul-safari, and it felt as if we had pierced the veil of illusion that we had been trapped in all our lives, and as if we could finally see the truth about existence for the first time.

Bobby gave me the LSD, and when it started coming on, he placed me in a bubble and floated me all the way down from 88th Street to The Village.

I felt like Toad of Toad Hall on a magical mystery tour of the city, insulated in my magic capsule. I came to see that there was an entire, mysterious Universe inside me, and my mind was totally blown.

I remember at one point that Bobby maneuvered us into an elevator and pressed the button for the 35th floor. The door closed, and Bobby looked at me very seriously, and told me that we were now in a space ship, and that I should pay careful attention, because I would see amazing things if I looked out the porthole.

As I looked out I could see that it was true. The cosmos with all the planets and all the stars floated serenely outside, as if suspended in jelly. Bobby seemed to be talking for hours, like some kind of cosmic tour guide, explaining the mysteries of time and space, as we went up, up and away into the great expanse above. The doors finally opened after what seemed like an eternity.

All night we floated around in our "bubbles" – all the way down 7th Avenue, from Upper to Lower Manhattan, until our mystery tour wound down to an end in an all-night diner in Greenwich Village. We ordered a lot of food, but didn't eat any of it. When it was all over I crashed out, and slept for the rest of the weekend.

That was my first experience with LSD, and three years later, there in San Francisco, it was about to start all over again for my second, and final trip.

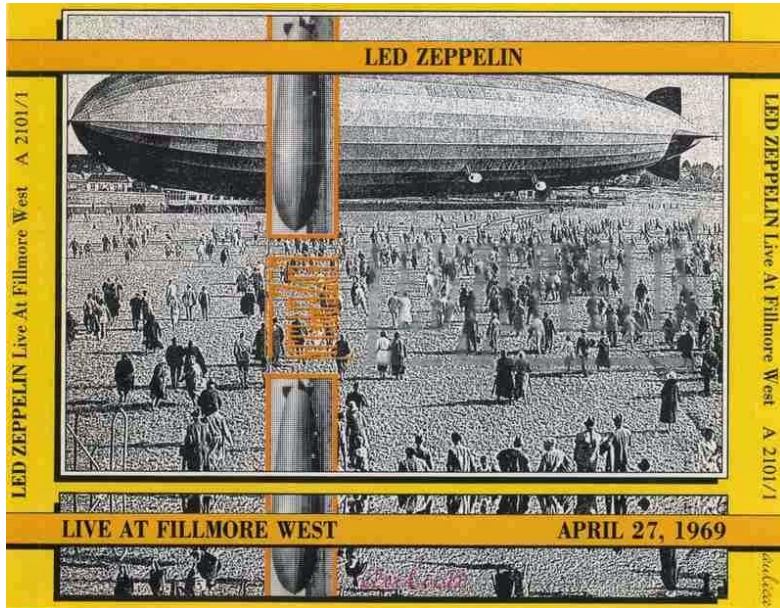
Fillmore West

"What exactly was that pill you gave me?" I asked the driver.

"That, my friend, was the finest LSD in the city." He said, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, and I realized that I was about to have an out-of-body-experience again.

Fillmore West is one of the most famous music venues in the country. Bands like Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, The Grateful Dead, Jimmy Hendrix and Creedence Clearwater Revival were regulars there. It was an 'underground' culture that would one day blossom into an amazing worldwide phenomenon, and we were fortunate enough to be there, during the heyday.

Somehow we arrived at the venue in one piece, and when we got inside, the music was pumping from five different stages. It seemed like there were thousands of people, all dancing to "Let's all get stoned."



By then the LSD waves were coming on *Full Blast Man*, and I was "turned on, tuned in, and dropped out."

At some point I got separated from my friends, and I was just drifting through the crowd, floating along on the psychedelic vibes, dancing like a wild thing, leaving my body and then returning again, and my mind was flooded by an unstoppable surge of impressions. It was intense.

I remember that I looked at the stage where someone was jamming the saxophone, and I saw the notes peel out

of the instrument and drift into the air in the most delicious way. I felt myself irresistibly drawn to them, and then I was actually *eating* them.

It was indescribably beautiful, but then I realized what was actually happening, and at that very moment a policeman came into my field of vision, and I instantly sobered up. But that didn't last long either. Next thing the musical notes were floating gorgeously in the air like ethereal artworks again. I remember that it felt completely satisfying, as if a new kind of sense ability had been opened up in my mind, beyond the usual five. I could taste colors and feel sounds.

Some part of me was overjoyed that I could now experience what I had been looking for in such a direct way, but of course, it was completely impossible to explain *how* it was happening, and I knew that it was only temporary. That didn't matter to me at the time. It was an immaculate sensation, and it filled me up to overflowing.

Finally, I vaguely remember that someone drove me home, as I drifted between these odd levels of consciousness. As it was with the first trip in New York, I just crashed out for a couple of days after that.

At the time I knew very little about hallucinogenic drugs, or as some call them today "entheogens." For me it was just an amazing experience, but I somehow sensed that there was more to it than I could understand.

Learning to Fly

I later learned that there's actually a very interesting connection between entheogenic substances like LSD and the mystical state of mind you can achieve through meditation. The word "entheogen" actually means a substance that gives you a direct experience of the Divine. It's like flipping a switch in your mind, and suddenly your mental world expands to include a lot more than you're used to, or that your rational mind can accept as 'real.' You can suddenly see that 'reality' contains dimensions that you never suspected.

A few years later I met John G. Bennet, who explained to me what these kinds of substances are really for. They're not meant purely for entertainment, or just to 'get your kicks,' as we were doing back then. When speaking about different psychedelic plants and drugs he told me:

"These plants and elements are here to give us a taste of the other worlds. When we take them, and experience these altered states of mind, we can begin to learn how to do it naturally, without needing to use those substances."

That makes a lot of sense to me now, and although I never took LSD again, that night will forever be etched into my memory. It gave me a small taste of the 'other world' – and I became very curious to know more about these things.

Not long after that I boarded the plane back to the Big Apple, where my journey would continue.

It was there that I found my first real teacher – who would expand my world view in so many important ways. I would end up uncovering the Chinese mysteries, discover the Fourth Way, and continue on my path towards understanding, with the help of some remarkable people.

Jack Kerouac once wrote: "The best teacher is experience and not through someone's distorted point of view."

As you will see in the following chapters, that's exactly the spirit in which I decided to continue my quest.

Chapter 6: European Craftsmen in New York City

Back in New York City, thanks to Paul's invitation, I could throw myself into other interests of mine: design and woodcarving.

Thinking back, the 1960s in New York City were a whole different dimension in my life. Those years were not only about Kenneth's Salon and its super rich clients, but some kind of energy in me that had always drawn me to the vibrant art, artists and creativity—in any shape or form—gave way to another part of my life that was full of exquisite craftsmanship. *Life itself is creative*—and for me, human beings are at their best when they're imagining something new, and making it come to life with their own two hands.

Sometime around 1966, I started developing an interest in woodcarving. There's something about working with wood that uplifts me and brings out my inner artist. I don't know if it's the fragrance of the wood itself, the feel of the wood-grain under my fingers or figuring out how to make the perfect dovetail or mortice and tenon joint. Every project is a journey of discovery.

Being able to look at a raw piece of wood and see what it could become—and then set to work turning it into a reality—was the best feeling in the world. To me, it was more than just an interest; I think I was falling in love with woodworking.

I found a master woodcarver from Sicily named Frank Lassitra, who could be found at a workshop in a loft on the Upper East Side around 66th and 1st Avenue. Whenever I got the chance, I would go there, and Frank would teach me a few tricks of the trade. He taught me about the incredible craftsmanship of 17th and 18th centuries, pure baroque woodworking. The chairs, tables, bureaus, cabinets and shelves from that period were so intricate, and superbly designed. I can't find enough words to describe what a magical time that was!



The masterpieces from that age radiate a luxurious sort of feeling—every piece is richly decorated with inlays, curls, carvings and gold leaf. You simply don't find that kind of craftsmanship and attention to detail anymore—only in antique shops, and only if you're lucky.

As I worked at my bench, I was learning patience and dedication. I learned to go with the grain of the wood, feeling what the living material wanted

to become. I learned that if you go against the grain, you ruin the carving, and hurt yourself in the process.

Frank would come over and show me where I was going wrong, and give me a few tips, and then go back to his carving again. It was a wonderful feeling to just get lost in the craft and feel my hands warm and tingling afterwards; I would end up covered in sawdust and shavings, and somehow that felt so rewarding.

Learning the Craft, Living the Life

During that time, I had the privilege to meet a number of amazing craftsmen. There was a man from Brazil who could do the most amazing gold-leafing on glass. I also got to know James Capovan, who became the mentor and great-grandfather I never had. Even if I was only in my twenties at the time, and he was already in his eighties, we hit it off famously.

James was a man of many talents; he taught me so many things about work and life. He loved what he did, his craft was his life, and those hands of his could do anything. He never missed a day of work, and he was never out of things to do. To this day, I still remember him proudly saying, "I've never been out of work for a single day in my entire life!" His skill, his craftsmanship, and his strong work ethic sustained him through the Great Depression, recessions, and both World Wars. No matter what was happening, his willing hands would always put food on his table.

James was a master goldsmith, silversmith and metalsmith who had come from Venice. He knew many things about art and culture, and he had the street-smarts to match. A craftsman, a street urchin, and a rare character! When I was around him, it was as if I was basking in the

light of his deep life-knowledge, and I was so grateful to be absorbing it all. I was lucky to have met Jimmy.

We decided to start our own little enterprise – a workshop, gallery and shop. Call it coincidence or call it synchronicity, but we found the perfect spot for it on East 77th Street, right across from my apartment. I ended up becoming the business manager, and James continued doing what he did best: state-of-the-art crafts. He moved into the basement and set up his workshop, where he had apprentices coming from Canada and all across the United States. They came



from far and wide to learn and work in the workshop. You could hear them all day long banging on copper pots, re-tinning them and creating beautiful artwork out of a scrap we found lying around.

We found amazing treasures in the trash heaps on Park and Fifth Avenues. Early in the mornings, we'd sift through the trash, and find old, broken furniture and cast-away household items, even works of art that were in near ruins.

We didn't mind – with the skills at our disposal we could restore them, good as new. A little bit of imagination, lots of know-how, some hard work, and Presto! Something new and beautiful out of something old and abused.

In our company, there was also a Czechoslovakian man, Tony Merka, who was a genius at mixing paints. He had an incredible knack at restoring the canvases we found. He was so talented that he could bring any artwork back to life again, no matter how dirty, ripped or spoiled it was. We dragged all the trash back to our little workshop, and—like magic—we would create things of beauty.

We named our business *European Craftsmen Limited*—and it was a success. More and more apprentice workers got to know about us, and they wanted to come study under the master. When the apprentices were finished with their training, they went off and started their own businesses. We trained jewelry makers, furniture restorers, painters, carpenters, and entrepreneurs. I learned so much about arts and crafts during that time, and gained a world of understanding about antiques too.

In 1969 we were able to take part in an event sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation called *Forging a Nation*. James became one of the featured artists. During that event, limousines would arrive in the morning to take him to the show, while trucks picked up the tools and workbenches, and carted them off to the Rockefeller Center. We made the news, and they even featured us on television channels, such as CBS, NBC and ABC. They all ran a story on "James Capovan, the master metalworker from Venice."

Those Were the Days

To be honest, I don't know how I managed it. I had to run the business in my spare time—and there wasn't very much of that. Most days I would get back from work at Kenneth's at six or seven in the evening and take a nap until ten or eleven; and then, after a quick shower and shave, I would be back at it again. If I wasn't at the workshop, I was at the clubs. In ten years of New York life, I don't think I ever slept—I must have survived on naps only! Life was just too exciting for sleep.

In those years you could go out to the cafes like *The Kettle of Fish*, *White Horse Tavern* or *Gas Light*; or to the discos in Greenwich Village and catch performances by Barbara Streisand, Mary Hopkins, Tony Curtis, or any number of up-and-coming stars. The folk music scene was famous too. It was a melting pot and an artist's canvas of a brand-new world culture. The Mary Hopkins hit song from 1968 springs to mind:



"Once upon a time there was a tavern
Where we used to raise a glass or two
Remember how we laughed away the hours
And dreamed of all the great things we would
do
Those were the days my friend
We thought they'd never end
We'd sing and dance forever and a day
We'd live the life we choose
We'd fight and never lose
For we were young and sure to have our way
La la la la..."

Chapter 7: Longina, My Fairy Godmother

Life is a beautiful and strange mystery. We're born into it, innocent and new, and along the way we learn to adapt, to grow, and to savor the moment. Why get stuck in resentment, negativity or a boring life? The Magic and Mystery are always just around the corner.

If my adventures in life have taught me anything, it is this: Stay open to the flow of your life, no matter where the meandering stream takes you. The things we long for are always and everywhere magnetically drawn into our lives, right on time—sometimes in simple ways, sometimes in mysterious or unexpected ways.

Of course, that doesn't mean that people get everything they want, exactly when they want it. It means that we get exactly the kind of experiences that will show us who we are, and what we can become. Life reveals itself to us only when we reveal ourselves to it. We get amazing opportunities—if only we're awake and alert when they come along, and if only we're not too afraid to grab them with both hands.

What had drawn me to San Francisco was this feeling, deep inside me, that there was a whole other dimension to life that was right in front of me, hiding in plain sight. ***I had come across an ancient mystery, and a secret underground stream of knowledge that was just waiting to be revealed to me.***

I could sense it, the way people and animals know when a storm is coming. I knew it was calling to me— and I was searching for it, but for now, I was happy to let it simply unfold however and whenever it was supposed to.

In the meantime, I was as busy as ever.

The Birth of the Morocco Method--The Five Elements of Hair Care

Back in New York I was settling into my new routine. Calling on all the hair-care knowledge I had picked up so far, from working at Kenneth's, Revlon and elsewhere, I was putting it all to use, and going my own way.

During those years I was inventing what would later come to be known as the *Morocco Method* – which usually meant spending a lot of time mixing things in my bathtub.

I was making my five elixir shampoos and conditioners in my little rent-controlled apartment, and I was traveling to the homes of Divas and the Super Rich on appointment.

My products were the most natural and organic in the world, even though back then people didn't know too much about "natural" products. Those were interesting times.

I've described how I developed the method in *Awaken Your Roots*. The basic foundation techniques I learned from Rita, the leading botanist and elixir maker at Kenneth's. Rita was a phenomenal scalp and hair expert, also a classically trained botanist who ran the fifth floor of Kenneth's, creating individually tailored shampoos and conditioners, known in the salon world as hair elixirs-for the rich and famous.

Rita kept her formulas secret from everyone, and it was only by luck and a twist of fate that I convinced her to share some of them with me. Rita wanted to get Jackie Kennedy as a client, and as it happened, I had a good relationship with Jackie. She trusted me, and best of all, Jackie really did need work done on her scalp because I'd noticed that her hair was beginning to thin. She was my golden ticket. So Rita traded some of her secrets about the base formulas for a chance to work with Jackie.

From those basic recipes I started experimenting. From there I added all the knowledge I gained over the years to perfect my own elixirs. I learned Five Elements theory from Cecilia Lu, a Chinese doctor from Shanghai, and Dr. Fung Yi, an eighth degree jiu-jitsu black belt, who was Bruce Lee's master teacher. There were so many others besides, but those are some of the stories I will share in later chapters.

And it worked out wonderfully for me. I still had a big enough laundry list of clients, and I had the freedom to come and go as I pleased. It was the easiest thing in the world to pick up the phone, make an appointment, and head over to a penthouse for a quick color and cut--and Voila! Easy money.

I also spent much of my time at the little shop I spoke about in a previous chapter.

European Craftsmen Limited was flourishing, and attracting a lot of attention. New Yorkers loved those tiny curiosity shops off the beaten path. There was a kind of cultural Renaissance in NYC. If it was "made by Beatniks," it was gold.

Nobody had heard of the words: "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" yet, but that's what we were doing. Greenwich Village was marching to its own beat; it had its own unique rhythm. It was eccentric, and it was alive.

Every day the craftsmen would bring in new treasures from the junk heap on 5th Avenue and Park, and then set to work turning them into works of art. I would have to move all the new pieces onto the floor, tag them, organize them, and price them, while dealing with the odd customer who popped in for a look around.

Longina, my Fairy Godmother

It was a typical night in the shop, and it was getting late—perhaps around eleven in the evening—and it was high time to close up. (We used to close very late sometimes. As they say, the city never sleeps).

I was totally immersed in my work, sorting through all the day's new arrivals, and taking care of all the details. Ever since I had started on my spiritual journey, I had started to learn the value of being utterly present—completely focused on the Here and Now of the moment—and that was what I was doing (or at least, trying to do; it's not as easy as it sounds).

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed an elderly woman moving around in the shop. Nothing too out-of-the-ordinary, but my attention was drawn to this woman for some reason. She was wandering about the store, browsing thoughtfully, admiring some of the pieces on display, and I overheard her speaking softly to herself. She was very graceful, with silvery hair, snowy skin, and piercing blue eyes, and there was something very refined about her manner. I sensed something, but I couldn't say what it was.

"Amazing energy." She was mumbling, peering intently at something, touching something here, and examining something else over there. "Very unusual." She said, looking at the next piece. "Big energy here..."

I was used to all sorts of people going through the store, but something about this particular woman was making me very curious about her. When she wandered a little closer, she absently said:

"Oh, you must be one of the craftsmen who made these wonderful works of art."

"Just let me know if I can be of assistance." I called to her, but she only smiled at me, and politely refused, and kept looking around the shop, cooing now and again, and running her hands over one or another piece of art that attracted her attention.

I pretended to be busy with something else, but all the while I watched her. It was getting pretty late, so I told her I would be closing the shop soon, and repeated again:

"Just shout if there's anything I can do."

She stopped what she was doing, and looked at me in the strangest way. She was so mysterious—as if she had floated out of a story--book, like a witch or a fairy godmother. I wasn't sure which of the two. Her eyes blue had a kind of intensity. Then she nonchalantly said to me:

"I'm here because I'm your Birthday Present."

With a sudden shock of realization, I remembered the date – it was May 4th. How did that happen? I had been so busy all day that I hadn't even thought about it. And then, almost as if on cue, I heard a noise coming up from the basement below.

Jimmy, David, Frank and Tony were climbing up the steps from the basement with a birthday cake, and one by one they popped up from the trap-door, like Santa's little helpers, singing "Happy Birthday to You!" Our little shop rang with the sounds of laughter and merriment, as someone brought out a bottle of Armagnac and some glasses.

That was how they were--always ready to celebrate life with all their hearts. What a wonderful surprise! And for the moment all thoughts of the silver-haired lady were blown out of my mind, as I happily blew out the candles on the birthday cake. Poof!

"Make a wish!" Someone shouted, as the glasses started clinking and sounds of congratulations rang in the air.

I know you're not supposed to say what you wished for, but I'll let you in on the secret—I was wishing to be able to master something I had learned from reading the teachings of George Gurdjieff: "To Remember Yourself Always and Everywhere."

That means remembering to stay conscious to the wonder of life, always. Not easy to do – especially since, in all the birthday excitement, I had already completely forgotten about the silver-haired lady, and when I noticed an extra plate with a slice of cake on it, I looked around the shop to invite her to enjoy it with us. But she was nowhere to be found. She had disappeared.

I raced outside, and ran up and down 2nd Avenue, hoping to find her, but it was no use. The shadow of the New York night had swallowed her up, and there was no trace of her anywhere. Just like Mrs. Esperanza, this mysterious lady had drifted into my life—only to vanish once more.

This time it was different, though. Somehow I knew that the story was far from over.

Back in the shop the party was already underway. The Armagnac was flowing, and someone had brought out the cigars. I tried to tell them about the phantom lady in the store, but nobody seemed at all interested – and who can blame them? It was my birthday, after all, so it could wait—for it was time to seize the day.

I had to wait five weeks before I saw her again.

The Return of the Phantom Lady

One afternoon the phantom lady came into the shop again, and just like the last time, she drifted gracefully about the shop oohing and aahing as if she had discovered hidden treasures, or the finest silks in China.

This time I was ready to seize the opportunity. I kept my eyes on her, just in case she disappeared again. I wasn't going to let the chance slip through my fingers.

Finally we struck up a conversation.

It turned out that her name was Longina, and she was a Prima Donna with the Metropolitan Opera Company. She was from Poland, but she now lived as a recluse, not too far away, on 75th Street. The conversation flowed like a slow river, and soon we were talking more openly about ourselves.

"I'm on a mission." She told me seriously.

"What mission are you on?" I asked.

"I could feel the energy of this place the moment I walked in," she said effusively, "and I knew there was something that I had to do here. Can you feel the energy? It's big!"

I was open to what she was saying, and I somehow sensed that there was a lot more to Longina than I had suspected at first. She was as graceful as a goddess in disguise, with her silver hair flowing down to her shoulders, and some kind of crystal fire in her gaze. It was as if she had popped into existence from another dimension—right on my birthday—to deliver a message from the Universe.

"It's no accident that we met," she told me, and as we talked, I became convinced that she was pointing the way to the esoteric mysteries I was longing for. The way she spoke made it clear that she was in touch with something deep and mysterious, something I just had to know.

She left her address and phone number, saying that she was pressed for time, but that I should contact her again, because there was a lot more she was going to unfold....

And there's a lot more to that story—but it will have to wait for another chapter. The story is far from over.

CHAPTER 8: SHAPING THE SPIRIT

My inner radar was buzzing. My intuition told me that this was an important milestone in my life—one of those rare encounters where you can see your life path splitting into two different directions. I knew I had to act on that feeling—as if my life depended on it. As the great mystic Patanjali said: "It is not enough to have intuitions; we must act on them; we must live them."

I was still in Search of the Miraculous, and more than anything I wanted to find the true teachings that I had caught a glimpse of back in San Francisco. I wasn't interested in finding another charlatan like Alex Horn: I wanted to find the pure mountain streams of wisdom. And this encounter with the phantom lady had reminded me that it was important not to just sit on my hands. I had to act.

Call it coincidence or synchronicity—but my friend Stephen was talking to me, telling me about his father who owned the famous Strand Bookstore on lower 14th and Broadway. It was a family business, which Stephen, a spoiled rich kid, was going to inherit one day. The thing is, Stephen's father had connections all over, and Stephen told me he could find anything, anywhere. It was worth a try, so I asked him to find the students of Gurdjieff in New York.

True to his word, a couple of days later Stephen handed me the telephone number of the offices of Lord John Pentland. He was connected to the British Petroleum Company, and it was said that Lord Pentland was part of the inner circle of Gurdjieff's true followers. I was like a bloodhound on the scent, and when I called Lord Pentland's secretary, she asked me: "What is your question?"

Shivers ran down my spine, because I'd heard that phrase before, up on the mountaintop. I knew I was getting close, and I was given an appointment to meet with Lord Pentland.



Lord Pentland

The moment I laid eyes on the man, I was absolutely sure that I was on the right track. Lord Pentland had a kind of intensity about him. He had a way of really *listening* to you in a way that made you realize that he was fully present, fully alert. A Conscious Being if ever I met one!

Here was a man that had clearly worked on his inner self. As I told him about my experiences with Alex Horne on the mountain, and about the people I had met, and the insights I had already discovered, I got the sensation that he was a true teacher. He told me he knew Alex personally, and he confirmed my feelings about him. Lord Pentland assured me that I had made the right choice in leaving that mountain, and that I was indeed on the right trail now.

That settled it for me. I sensed that I was in the presence of something real and true—not just another charlatan. Something about this man's energy was calling to a deep level of my *Being*.

I was invited to a meeting that Tuesday on East 66th Street, but I was asked to say nothing about the meeting.

Back in those years this kind of knowledge was not widely available. It was a secret underground society dedicated to the ancient esoteric knowledge of the self, and it was all very hush-hush. We weren't allowed to speak about it on pain of death. It was serious business, and not for those who only had a passing interest. If you were in it, you were really in it.

These days it's no secret at all, of course. You can Google all you need to know about Gurdjieff, and there are thousands of books written about these kinds of societies. But things were different in those years. Anyone who desired deeper knowledge of the esoteric mysteries had to go a long way to find it.

But it was worth all the effort, and then some. During those meetings I learned about the incredible power of our consciousness, and just how difficult it is to master the mind and the emotions. To give you an idea, here's a quote from Lord Pentland's teachings:

"A part of my energy is detached from my present state. Whether I am trying to be quiet, or struggling with some unpleasant emotion, this part of my presence is unconcerned, detached from it all. I am oblivious of the fact that this free energy is part of me. I am only

partly present. But when, through the work of a sustained attentive inner listening, I become aware of this detached energy, accepting the fact that I cannot even be sure I know to whom this unattached energy belongs or what it means—that this “unknowing” elicits a state of *presence* accompanied by a relaxation of the body, particularly in the neck and shoulders, and a sense of warmth in the solar plexus region. All the restlessness disappears as the free energy finds a place in the body where it can naturally relate to other inner energies."

What he is talking about here has started to become known today under a number of different disguises. It's what Eckhardt Tolle means when he talks about "Presence" and *The Power of Now*. It's what Osho means when he talks about "walking without feet, flying without wings, and thinking without mind." It's the same message, in one way or another, that has come down to us from all the ancient mystics, and the modern ones too.

Finding this *presence* has become a part of the very fabric of my life, as time has taught me many lessons. I've never forgotten them, because it's not like learning from a book. This is living knowledge – the kind that you can only find by digging deeply into your very own nature.

In a way, this was my first introduction to the True Science – and a Meeting with a Remarkable Man.

Chapter 9: Longina, The Psychic

A few weeks passed, and I grew eager to take Longina up on her offer to visit her. On that late Saturday afternoon, I walked the one block over to 75th Street just off 2nd Avenue. Her building was grand turn-of-the-century New York City architecture: limestone with white window sills and a maroon canopy over the marble entranceway. I rang the bell but got no answer.

Just then a tenant came out the door. “Do you know Longina?” I asked her. She casually looked me over then said, “Oh. Longina. Yes, she’s 2nd floor, apartment 5-C.”

With that I simply slipped through the door and proceeded to find the elevator. In those days, living in New York City, one just took the lead, not asking questions or waiting to be granted permission to do anything. The unwritten law was to either be aggressive or to be left out of the adventure.

Arriving on the second floor, as I walked down the hallway I said to myself, *Wow. Nice apartment building! It must either be rent controlled or very expensive. Like way out of my budget.*

I ring the doorbell, hear the scraping of unbolting several locks, and there she is. “Enter, I’ve been expecting you. You’re a little late, but come on in.”

Her great entranceway has a foyer that leads down five marble steps into the living room, which is so large it even has a baby grand piano by the bay windows. Later I find out Longina teaches voice and has a string of students coming and going. She’s multi-talented and a soprano at the Met to boot!

She shows me around her place. It has two bedrooms, two bathrooms and an eat-in kitchen, the works—and all for a grand total of \$58 dollars a month. Of course it’s rent controlled, even lower than my \$68 a month and 3 times larger. But she’s had this apartment for decades she says, as she shows me into the master bedroom. The entire apartment is crammed with stuff: there are magazines and newspapers piled up all over the place. Just tons of stuff. *Wow, how does she find anything around here?* I wondered. *There are just piles of stuff!*

I later find out Longina has a sometimes houseguest named Miray /The Wind who is a homeless and quite wild lady. She just appears at times when the weather makes it unbearable to sleep outside and hangs out—and then disappears. Longina says Miray brings stuff over all the time as she does dumpster diving and collects junk from the street cans, and always bestows on Longina presents of many kinds.

The only other person allowed to visit her abode besides her students is Richard, her boyfriend. He's a bookkeeper-type, very bland and boring. Even Longina finds him very bland and boring, but he just hangs out saying very little and always reading stuff from the junk piles.

This is all expected and not surprising as, after all, it's New York City 1965 and Longina is a recluse. I think, *She only allows two people into her apartment and now me, being the 3rd. Amazing! How do I rate being one of the big three guests?*

Now I'm so curious about how I fit into Longina's picture. But my first visit is cut short by a student arriving for a voice lesson, so Longina announces, "Time to go, but stop by anytime because we still have many stories to exchange!" Being true to her word, my next visit, less than one week later, goes better. As my curiosity and sense of intrigue grow, I find myself stopping in quite often, generally on Saturdays late afternoons which soon turn into a weekly exchange of stories and more adventures.

For instance, Longina tells me of her late husband Skippy, an Italian who was a master violinist and had passed away several years before.

She tells me of how after Skippy dies that she goes into a coma. After being depressed and losing focus, she was found in her bedroom unconscious and in a severe coma. The story is that the neighbors, after not seeing her for five days but hearing her students coming and going, but her not answering her door, called the Fire Department who broke the door down and forced entry.

Longina is taken to the local hospital and pronounced DOA , dead on arrival. Next she is to be taken to the morgue.

In the hospital hall, she hears folks talking about how they're moving her to a refrigerator slab. Lying on the wheeled bed, she says to herself, "OH NO! This will never do! I'm not *dead*--just my body is not cooperating with my mind." So she says to herself, "I demand that my baby finger move," and after a few intense moments, she hears one of the nurses screaming, "LOOK! Her finger is moving up and down quite a bit here!" With that they wheel Longina back up to a room and start doing things to her. And she starts demanding that her body move this finger, then this finger, then this hand, all with the excitement of the doctors and nurses in the room yelling, "She's coming back to life!"

Upon a semi-conscious recovery, she's told by doctors and nurses that she was in a coma for five days in her apartment, and when she arrived at the hospital, she had no pulse or life force. So they had moved her to the morgue posthaste as the hospital was full and they needed the bed.

Longina excitedly tells me how she comes to put the pieces of these stories together and tells herself, *Okay, I have to get out of here!* So she starts to demand that her body parts

move. Slowly she begins moving around and walking. And within two days she's up and dressed and ready to return home as she has places to go and things to do and NO time to sit around this place.

She's released and returns home only to find out she's now quite handicapped. She's feeling very challenged getting around just to do very basic things like walking, getting dressed, waking up, and getting out of bed. She tells me how she keeps telling her body that it must do these things and how painful it all is, yet feeling she has to get back to her nightly tours of the city where she meets and greets folks and has stories to tell them about what she sees in their future and has messages to convey to them and so on.

Shortly she runs into her husband's brother Vinnie on the street in front of her apartment. After hearing her story, he's all excited telling Longina how he could no longer play the violin as his hands were all crippled up with arthritis. Then he found "ah-akk-u -pun-tourist" and still he's talking very excitedly. Longina is not understanding what Vinnie is trying to convey. But after some time she gets her usually stressful hands to convey to Vinnie "What are you talking about? What is this "ah-akk-u -pun-tourist" stuff?" Finally Vinnie, who speaks very broken English in half-Italian and in a half-broken Brooklyn accent, spells out "acupuncturist" and says that he found a miracle worker who is Chinese and does acupuncture. She just put in a few needles and now he can play the violin with his left hand and his right hand—and can even play the violin with his feet! He tells Longina he is feeling great and now back at the Met.

Vinnie spells out the name and address of the lady who supposedly is the miracle worker and in his half-broken Italian and English singsong says he's off to play at the Met and hurries off, leaving Longina in a semi-confused conversation. Yet she realized this must be the missing link to her puzzle: how to get back to where she was wanting to get back to.

Her usual routine of mystery and magic is unknowable to most of us who never heard of such psychic powers. Longina tells me with great enthusiasm that she keeps walking and finds herself in front of Saint Patrick's Cathedral and simply goes up the stairs and into the church—a place that she normally would never enter into. She walks down the aisles toward the main altar and stops in front of a "Mummy" as she calls them and the "Mummy" is just standing there with candles lit all around her.

After prying it out of her, I finally figure out that Longina is standing in front of a statue of a saint in one of the side alcoves of the church.

She puts some money into the donation box, gets a stick and then lights one of the candles in front of the Mummy and tells her that she has to get back to her regular self. Now she's now in a confused state and having difficulty just performing her normal daily routines but she has places to go and things to do. Longina explains that she never goes into any church, least of all walking around one, but now finds herself magnetized and standing in front of one of the many Mummies. And she knows this is the place: To prove it, she takes

out the piece of paper on which Vincent wrote down the name and address of the Miracle Lady who has cured him, the one he swears to Longina is the Miracle Lady with the needles who has now gotten him back to playing his beloved violin.

Upon looking carefully down at the paper, she reads “Dr Cecelia Li, 1907 West 77th Street, Apt. 35-C. The only difference to her address and Longina’s is that it has a 3 in front of the 5-C and her name is Cecelia. Looking back up at the Mummy, she reads the name on the plaque, SAINT CECELIA! With this information Longina realizes she’s being taken to the next place in time for her prayers to be answered: “I have places to go and things to do.”

So with this she heads out, takes a subway, and winds up at West 77 Street and finds 1907. She enters to find the doorman not admitting anyone unless they have permission to get onto the elevator. In those days, the doormen were supreme guards over all who entered or left the building. Being a true New Yorker, Longina waits for a crowd of folks entering and follows them into the main entrance and onto one of the three elevator—and mission accomplished. She gets in, and pushes floor 35 and up, up, up she goes.

Upon arrival she is directed by her psychic energies to the door that will read 35-C. She rings the doorbell only to hear a voice demand: “Who are you and what do you want and who sent you here?” Realizing this was a secret place that only folks who had the inside scoop could get into, she announces : “It’s me, Longina, and I have been sent here by Saint Cecelia.” With this the door opens and a young but stern Chinese face invites her in and brings her into the living room to explain herself:

More To Come Soon!